

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE - 9 FEBRUARY 2021

SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL MEETING – 23 FEBRUARY 2021

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

Present

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

Also Present

Councillor Julia Potts, Councillor Carole Cockburn, Councillor Jenny Else, Councillor Michael Goodridge MBE, Councillor John Gray, Councillor Peter Isherwood, Councillor Richard Seaborne, Councillor Christine Baker, Councillor David Beaman, Councillor Maxine Gale, Councillor Jerry Hyman and Councillor Peter Nicholson

EXE 64/20 MINUTES (Agenda item 2)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 December 2020 were confirmed and would be signed in due course.

EXE 65/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3)

There were no declarations of interests raised under this heading.

EXE 66/20 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4)

The Executive received the following question in accordance with Procedure Rule 10:

i) From Karen Lankester of Godalming:

“How much has WBC spent/committed on property management/repairs (council housing) procurement consultants’ fees in the past 3 financial years, and the forthcoming year budgeted.”

Response from Cllr Anne-Marie Rosoman, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Safety:

“The spend for specialist procurement consultants for Council housing maintenance over the last three years is £94,233.05. Their work included:

- an options appraisal on the future maintenance of our 5000 properties;

- support for the procurement of the Housing Service's responsive repair, planned maintenance and framework contracts, valued at £50m;
- providing support following the early termination of the responsive repair contract by the contractor;
- supporting the procurement of an interim responsive repair contract; and
- supporting the procurement of a new long term responsive repair contract.

There is £50K in the budget for 2021/22 to complete the procurement of the new responsive repair contract.”

EXE 67/20 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda item 5)

There were no questions from Members.

EXE 68/20 LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES (Agenda item 6)

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

- The Housing Operations Team continued to meet regularly with the Tenants Panel members via Zoom, and the Panel had been providing support and signposting tenants to services. Members and Officers were grateful for the active involvement of the Tenants Panel.
- Council housing rent arrears were being maintained at under 1%, compared to a national average of 3.68%, which was a remarkable achievement. The number of void properties had reduced, and the team was working hard to clear the backlog from the first lockdown. Responsive repairs had continued to be carried out through this lockdown, as well as gas safety checks.
- The Ockford Ridge development project was continuing: demolition had begun on Site B, and the planning application had been submitted for Site C.
- In terms of homelessness, there were three single people in the York Road hostel in Woking and one person in B&B. Numbers were much lower than in the previous lockdown because a number of rough sleepers and 'sofa surfers' had been identified and either re-housed or have not approached Waverley again. Under the Government's Next Steps accommodation programme, a grant had been obtained for two modular units for temporarily housing rough sleepers, a site was being considered and the Planning Service was providing pre-application advice.
- Meetings of the Safer Waverley Partnership were continuing. There had been a decrease in burglaries during the lockdown, but an increase in anti-social behaviour which included Covid breaches. British Transport Police had been working with Surrey Police to address anti-social behaviour on trains locally.
- The LPP2 consultation had ended and 430 responses had been received from a wide range of contributors. Officers were now beginning to analyse the responses.

- Regulation 16 Consultations on the Bramley and Haslemere Neighbourhood Plans were underway, concluding 19 March 2021.
- The opening date for the Brightwells Yard development had been pushed back from July to September 2021. Commercial lettings continued to be challenging due to the pandemic, but Crest were confident that sufficient units would be let to open in September. Waverley continued to be supportive of the development.
- An increased amount of car parking had been made available free of charge for people attending the Cranleigh Covid vaccination centre.
- A new Parking Spaces Order would be coming forward in the Spring, to enable the Brightwells Yard car park to be included.
- The council had now distributed over £30m of government grants to local businesses. With regard to the recent Supreme Court decision regarding business interruption insurance and Covid, Waverley was working closely with Places Leisure to understand how the ruling impacted on their policies specifically.
- Cyber security was a business issue as well as a technical IT issue, and it was important that Members and staff contributed to keeping the council's and residents' data safe and secure.
- The Leader and Deputy Leader had had productive discussions with the NHS Surrey Heartlands CCG and the Leader and Deputy Leader of Guildford Borough Council, and the Council Leaders had then jointly produced a video which was available via Eagle radio.
- The Deputy Leader thanked the Communications and Engagement Manager, Harri Robinson, who was leaving the council, for all her hard work and in particular in supporting the council's Covid response over the past 12 months. On behalf of the Executive, he wished her every success in her future career.

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 69/20 GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22 AND MTFP 2021/22 - 23/24 (Agenda item 7)

- 69.1 Cllr Mark Merryweather, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Assets and Commercial, introduced the report setting out the draft General Fund Budget for 2021/22 and the latest Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2021/22 to 2023/24. The content of the report and annexes had already been considered in depth at the Value for Money Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, and followed on directly from the presentations and discussion on the budget and MTFP that had been held during the year as the financial impact of the Covid pandemic had become clearer.
- 69.2 Cllr Merryweather outlined the structure of the General Fund and the constraints on use of different categories of funds. The pre-Covid 2020/21 budget and MTFP was already under significant financial pressure due to

factors outside of the council's control, in particular due to government cuts to the council's share of business rates. In August, the estimated gross financial loss in 2020/21 alone was £6.6m, due to lost income and increased costs arising from responding to the pandemic, and this had been addressed through a combination of financial support from the government, emergency savings, and a drawdown of earmarked reserves. The budget strategy for 2021/22 and the MTFP continued the approach of managing the capital programme and earmarked reserves, alongside a proposed maximum increase in council tax in 2021/22.

69.3 With regard to the Capital Strategy, the intention had been to recommend the existing Strategy to April 2021 to allow recently announced changes in the government's borrowing rules to be included. However, a technical consultation had just been issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting on proposed changes to the Treasury Management Code and Prudential Code of Capital Finance in Local Authorities to reflect the proposed government changes, with the intention of publishing a revised Prudential Code towards the end of the year for 2021/22 implementation. In the light of this, it was now recommended that Council extend the validity of the 2020/21 Capital Strategy until an updated document could be presented to Council by February 2022 at the latest.

69.4 The proposed amendment to Recommendation 7 was seconded by the Leader, and agreed unanimously by the Executive, as follows:

"7. Agrees to extend the 2020/21 Capital Strategy to cover the period up to the Council meeting in February 2022, at the latest."

69.5 In response to a question from Cllr Beaman that highlighted the uncertainty and dissatisfaction around the business rates regime, Cllr Merryweather reiterated his view that the most beneficial step the government could take to help council funding would be to allow the council to keep a higher proportion of the business rates collected. The Leader advised that he would be writing to the government to make this point, and he would be inviting the Leader of the Principal Opposition Group to join in with him in this.

69.6 **The Executive RESOLVED to recommend to Council that it:**

- 1. agree a £5 increase in Waverley's Band D Council Tax Charge for 2021/22 with resultant increases to the other council tax bands;**
- 2. agree to make no change to the Council's existing Council Tax Support Scheme and continue to allocate additional Government support to help those council taxpayers most financially affected by the pandemic;**
- 3. agree the proposed Fees and Charges for 2021/22;**
- 4. approve the General Fund Budget for 2021/22 as summarised in Annexe 2, incorporating the baseline net service cost variations included at Annexe 3 and the staff pay award;**
- 5. approve the specific use of reserves to mitigate the Covid-19 uncertainty risk and the estimated reduction in retained business rate funding over the Medium Term Finance Plan period, and the other reserve movements as set out in the annexe 6,**

6. **approve the General Fund Capital Programme; and,**
7. **agree to extend the 2020/21 Capital Strategy to cover the period up to the Council meeting in February 2022 at the latest.**

EXE 70/20 HRA BUSINESS PLAN 2021/22 - 2023/24 (Agenda item 8)

- 70.1 Cllr Anne-Marie Rosoman, Portfolio for Housing and Community Safety, introduced the proposed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan for 2021/22 – 2023/24. The HRA had a number of drivers, including the cost of servicing the 2012 borrowing to acquire the council's social housing stock. This borrowing had been taken on the assumption that rents would rise annually with reference to the rate retail price index. However, in 2016 the Conservative government implemented major changes for the HRA finances requiring statutory annual rent reductions of 1% per annum year-on-year for 4 years, and it was only last year that the council was allowed to increase the rent once more.
- 70.2 It was proposed that the rent increase for 2021/22 be set below the maximum allowed, at 1.25% in order to generate income to fund annual repairs, the core maintenance program and the new build and remodelling capital programme. The Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the draft HRA Business Plan and endorsed the recommendations set out in the report.
- 70.3 **The Executive RESOLVED to recommend to Council that**
1. **the rent level for Council dwellings be increased by 1.25% from the 20/21 level with effect from 1 April 2021 within the permitted guidelines contained within the Government's rent setting policy;**
 2. **the average weekly charge for garages rented by both Council and non-Council tenants be increased by 50 pence per week excluding VAT from 1 April 2021;**
 3. **the service charges in senior living accommodation be increased by 30 pence per week from 1 April 2021 to £19.80;**
 4. **the recharge for energy costs in senior living accommodation be increased by 50 pence per week from 1 April 2021;**
 5. **the revised HRA Business Plan for 2021/22 to 2024/25 as set out in Annexe 1 be approved;**
 6. **the approval change for the fees and charges as set out in Annexe 2 is noted;**
 7. **the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programmes as shown in Annexe 3 be approved;**
 8. **the financing of the capital programmes be approved in line with the resources shown in Annexe 4.**

EXE 71/20 ANNUAL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2021/22 (Agenda item 9)

- 71.1 The Leader introduced the draft Pay Policy Statement 2021/22. The Council was required to adopt and publish an Annual Pay Policy Statement each year and was not legally permitted to depart from the policies set out in that statement when it considered actual decisions in relation to individuals' remuneration, including redundancy and/or severance payments. The Annual Pay Policy Statement for the 2021/22 financial year had been updated
- 71.2 **The Executive RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the Pay Policy Statement for the 2021/22 financial year be approved.**

EXE 72/20 LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION (Agenda item 10)

- 72.1 Cllr John Ward, Leader of the Council, outlined the background to the 'council size' document prepared by the cross-party working group in response to the Local Government Boundary Commission of England (LGBCE) notification that they would be conducting an electoral review of Waverley. The LGBCE were fulfilling their statutory duty to carry out the review, and had resisted arguments from the Leadership and Chief Executive that challenged the appropriateness of carrying out the review during the pandemic on the basis that there were electoral inequalities that needed to be addressed.
- 72.2 The working group had worked through the LGBCE's template document, but while discussions had been constructive and helpful it had not been possible to reach a consensus on a the size of the council in the future. The Administration Groups had reached a compromise figure of 50 councillors, and this was the recommendation to Council, although it was recognised that the LGBCE would have the final decision on the future council size and would consider any other submissions received on the future council size.
- 72.3 **The Executive RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the LGBCE Council Size document (at Annexe 1 to the report) be approved as the Council's submission to the electoral review of Waverley Borough Council, including a proposed council size from May 2023 of 50 councillors.**

EXE 73/20 LOCAL GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION IN SURREY (Agenda item 11)

- 73.1 Cllr John Ward, the Leader of the Council, outlined the background to the commissioning of the KPMG report by the eleven Surrey boroughs and districts to put forward alternatives to the Surrey County Council single unitary council bid. When the government delayed the timeline for Surrey's single unitary bid, the focus of the KPMG report was directed to exploring options for further collaboration among councils in Surrey. The final KPMG report had now been circulated, and there would be an opportunity for an open debate on its findings at Council.

73.2 It was expected that Surrey County Council would try to progress its single unitary council bid at some stage, and therefore the Executive felt that it could be advantageous both politically and financially to explore options for closer cooperation with neighbouring councils. To this end, the Leader and Deputy Leader had had initial discussions with their counterparts at Guildford, and identified as a first step an approach using a third party to explore potential areas of collaborative working and financial savings.

73.3 **The Executive RESOLVED to:**

1. **note the KPMG report on future opportunities for local government in Surrey;**
2. **endorse the development of an initial options appraisal for collaboration with Guildford Borough Council;**
3. **allocate the remaining £15,000 budget previously approved for a “unitary council proposal” to “exploring collaboration opportunities with other councils”; and**
4. **RECOMMEND to Council that it debate opportunities for future collaboration among local authorities in the light of KPMG report and opportunities for collaboration as set out in the report.**

EXE 74/20 AFFORDABLE HOUSING SPD (Agenda item 12)

74.1 Cllr Andy MacLeod, Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy and Brightwells, introduced the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which was recommended to Council for adoption. The SPD had started development under the previous administration and set out the council’s approach for securing affordable housing in accordance with the application of relevant planning policies contained in Local Plan Part 1. The approach remained to require on site provision of affordable housing by developers, and to allow financial contributions only in exceptional circumstances. It also confirmed that the council would continue to seek 70% of affordable housing for social/affordable rent, and 30% to be for intermediate/shared ownership. Whilst noting that the increase in home-working during the pandemic had highlighted the challenges of living in a one-bed dwelling, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment prepared for Local Plan Part 1 guided the mix of sizes for affordable housing that the council would be seeking.

74.2 **The Executive RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document be approved.**

EXE 75/20 ICT STRATEGY 2021-2024 (Agenda item 13)

75.1 Cllr Peter Clark, Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and IT, introduced the ICT Strategy, 2021-2024, and recommended that it be endorsed to Council for approval. Cllr Clark highlighted the key issues that the strategy addressed: agility, transitions, skills, data management, cyber security, and residents. The strategy recognised the challenges that had been presented by the pandemic and rapid transition to home working for most staff, and the longer term consequences this would have on working practices and the type of IT support that would be required.

75.2 The Executive RESOLVED to recommend to Council that the ICT Strategy 2021-2024 be approved.

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 76/20 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS (SLAS) WITH COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS, 2021-2022 (Agenda item 14)

76.1 Cllr Michaela Martin introduced the report recommending the renewal of the current Service Level Agreements to twelve community organisations for one year. It had been a very challenging year for all community organisations, and the renewal of the current funding arrangements would give organisations some certainty for budgeting, staffing and service delivery purposes.

76.2 In response to a question from Cllr David Beaman, Cllr Martin reported that the SLA funding would be paid according to the individual SLA agreements, either the full year, quarterly or half-yearly, to support the individual organisations' budget forecasts and cash-flow. Officers would work with organisations so that if they were unable to deliver against their SLA, they could adapt their services in such a way as to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, particularly in relation to mental health, loneliness and social isolation as part of their local community response. Looking forward, during 2021, the relevant Portfolio Holders would be working with Officers and Community Wellbeing Overview & Scrutiny Committee to develop appropriate proposals for longer term funding based on community needs after Covid.

76.3 The Executive RESOLVED to:

- i) approve the renewal of the current SLAs with the 12 partner organisations for one year only, 2021/22 at the proposed levels of funding as shown in Annexe 1 and as part of the budget setting process.**
- ii) approve the withdrawal of funding to Brightwells Gostrey for the higher needs service and divert these funds to Haslewey to support services for older people and contribute towards running cost as shown in Annexe 1.**
- iii) agree the establishment of an Executive Working Group to review the councils funding mechanism to voluntary sector organisation from 1 April 2022.**

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and concluded at 7.50 pm

Chairman