

**Minutes of a Meeting of the  
Performance and Finance Scrutiny  
Committee held at Surrey Heath House  
on 29 July 2015**

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+ Cllr David Allen (Chairman)  
+ Cllr Wynne Price (Vice Chairman)

+ Cllr Dan Adams	+ Cllr Max Nelson
+ Cllr Bill Chapman	+ Cllr Robin Perry
+ Cllr Edward Hawkins	- Cllr Chris Pitt
+ Cllr Paul Innicki	+ Cllr Darryl Ratiram
+ Cllr Oliver Lewis	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler
+ Cllr Jonathan Lytle	+ Cllr John Winterton
+ Cllr Alan McClafferty	

+ Present

- Apologies for absence presented

In Attendance: Andrew Crawford, Cllr Josephine Hawkins, Cllr Ruth Hutchinson, Sarah Parmenter, Julia Hutley-Savage, Jenny Rickard and Cllr Charlotte Morley

**8/PF Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting and in particular, welcomed Councillor Charlotte Morley, the Regulatory Portfolio Holder, who would brief Members and answer questions on her Portfolio.

**9/PF Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 17 June 2015, were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

**10/PF Scrutiny of Portfolio Holders**

Councillor Charlotte Morley outlined the areas covered by her portfolio, focussing in particular on development control, drainage, land charges/technical support, planning & conservation, housing, private sector housing enforcement and Family Support.

Planning - Members welcomed the push within the Department to go paperless. It was noted that, in the future, it was intended that the majority of planning applications would be submitted electronically and speedily available on the Council's web site.

In 2014/15, 115 planning applications had been refused. Of those, 23 had been appealed. The Council had been successful on 12 appeals, 6 were still to be determined and 5 appeals had been upheld, 3 of which had resulted from Member overturns of officer recommendations.

Planning Policy, the Arboricultural Officer and the Drainage Engineer had contributed to significant improvements/developments over the previous year. The

drainage Engineer had been particularly successful in finding external grants to fund major and minor drainage projects across the Borough, as well as working with partner organisations to achieve notable reductions in incidences of flooding in the Borough.

In response to a Member's concerns on block tree preservation orders over large geographical areas, dating from the time of the Urban District of Frimley and Camberley, Councillor Morley confirmed that there would be a focus on tree issues over the forthcoming municipal year

Housing – Councillor Morley reminded Members that the Council no longer held housing stock, this having been handed to the Accent Housing Group. There were also other housing associations operating within the Borough. However, the Council maintained the Housing Register and applied the criteria by which social housing would be offered/allocated.

Housing Officers had focussed heavily on working with people to prevent homelessness and encourage downsizing. This had resulted in significant savings to the Council. The need for bed and breakfast accommodation had also been severely curtailed. There was limited bed and breakfast stock available in the Borough and accommodation was typically sourced in Aldershot, Ash Vale and Slough. However, only 2 individuals were currently so housed and both had made themselves intentionally homeless.

The Council's Housing Enforcement Officer worked to ensure safety and standards in rental accommodation and in particular in houses in multiple occupation.

The Committee noted, in response to a Member's question, that a television report in respect of a homeless family in the Borough was inaccurate, but that it had not been possible for the Council to discuss some of the very complex difficulties faced by both the Council and the family in question. The family had been offered accommodation, despite not meeting certain key criteria, but had refused the offer.

Family Support – As part of the Government's Troubled Families Scheme, Surrey County Council had sought District/Borough support to operate family support services, to make the service closer to, quicker and more responsive to the community. Surrey Heath and Runnymede Councils had jointly established a Family Support Team which dealt with families experiencing multiple problems/issues which involved multiple agency work.

A team is formed around the family where all relevant agencies will work together as one team to work with the whole family. Intensive support is offered with a family coordinator allocated to a family, working with each member of that family, to better understand the family dynamics and the hopes, aspirations and needs of each.

A key project aim was to reduce anti-social and criminal behaviour which, it was expected, would deliver indirect savings to other public bodies as a result. Knowledge gained so far suggested that young people and adults engaged in anti-social behaviour and criminal activity typically had issues around self-esteem,

anger and authority, but often did not meet the thresholds for either adult mental health or children's mental health services.

Members welcomed the improvements and new developments in services, highlighting in particular the much reduced use of bed and breakfast for homeless individuals/families, improvements in drainage/flooding incidences and the ground breaking work of the Family Support Team. In consideration of housing enforcement, the Committee noted that, whilst there was only one enforcement officer, significant increases in cases would be required to justify further resources.

**Resolved, that the report be noted.**

## **11/PF Review of Reserves and Provisions**

The Senior Accountant presented a report explaining the criteria for maintaining individual Reserves and Provisions, following the closure of the 2014/15 accounts and therefore as at 31 March 2015. She explained that Provisions were required for any liability of uncertain timing or amount that had been incurred. They were recognised when:

- The local authority has a present obligation (legal or constructive) as a result of a past event;
- It is probable that a transfer of economic benefit will be required to settle the obligation; and
- A reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation

Reserves were amounts set aside for specific policy purposes and balances which represented resources set aside for purposes such as general contingencies and cash flow management. Generally they were:

- A working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary temporary borrowing - this forms part of general reserves
- A contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies - this also forms part of general reserves
- A means of building up funds, often referred to as earmarked reserves, to meet known or predicted requirements.

The report included an estimate for each reserve/provision for 2016. A drop in reserves was shown in the region of £2 million. However, whilst this position could improve, the Committee would be updated after the issue of the External Auditor's annual report. It was noted that reserves were not used to meet any revenue shortfalls.

In the course of discussion, the following was highlighted in relation to individual reserves and provisions:

- (i) Atrium S106/Atrium Art – The Atrium S106 reserve was generated when the Atrium was built and had been used, mainly, for CCTV. The Atrium Reserve would be used to maintain the artwork in place.
- (ii) Blackwater Valley & Developer Contributions – Members requested details of specific expenditures going forward.
- (iii) Chobham and Town Team Partnership – Members noted that whilst some reserves attracted interest, other did not. The Senior Accountant indicated that funds generated by community groups tended to have interest added, whilst reserves generated by Government or Council funds did not, with interest going to the General Fund Working Balance.
- (iv) Community Fund – Although £75,000 was budgeted for, expenditure was rarely above £30,000 and this was reflected in the reserve. Councillor Josephine Hawkins reported that Community Fund Grants came within her Portfolio and that the deadlines for applications were the end of June and end of September each year. No monies were paid until works were completed.
- (v) Commuted Sums – These sums were allocated for maintenance on specific projects and could not be used for other purposes.
- (vi) Insurance Reserve – Members queried the level of this reserve. It was confirmed that the funds were being held against potential costs in connection with the rundown of Municipal Mutual Insurance. It was expected that the actual costs would become clearer shortly, with a supreme court judgement expected in the near future.
- (vii) Land Drainage – In response to a Member query on funding for the Frimley Fuel Allotments land, the Executive Head of Regulatory noted that the Council could only expend drainage funds on Council owned land.
- (viii) Remediation Fund – Although it had not been used since 2002, this fund had been established to cover the remediation costs of land damaged by traveller incursions. Members recommended that the purpose be changed to include preventative work. Clarification was also sought on the cost of incursions in Heatherside and how the remediation thereof would be funded.
- (ix) Repairs and Maintenance – The level of this reserve was based on the value of all the Council's assets and the likely cost if all repairs/maintenance had to be done in this financial year. This gave an anticipated annualised cost of work. Members requested a breakdown of expected costs in 2015/16.
- (x) Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) – An Interest free loan had been secured from the Enterprise M3 Local Enterprise Partnership to purchase SANGs. This would be recouped by a charge against developers offsetting new developments. The SANGs had to be maintained in perpetuity. Councillor McClafferty agreed to review projected SANGS maintenance costs with the Executive Head of Regulatory.
- (xi) Bagshot Library – Members sought details on what works were planned for this Council owned building.
- (xii) General Fund Working Balance – Members sought clarification on the significant reduction in this fund projected from 2015 to 2016.

**Resolved, that**

- (i) the report be noted; and**
- (ii) the Executive be advised to consider changing the purpose of the Remediation Fund, to include preventative work.**

**12/PF Work Programme**

The Democratic Services Officer updated Members on the proposed work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. He noted in particular that meetings were planned for:

30 September 2015;  
2 December 2015;  
27 January 2016; and  
23 March 2016.

The Committee agreed to the work programme attached at Annex A.

**Resolved, that the Work Programme, as attached at Annex A, be agreed.**

Chairman