

EXECUTIVE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
THURSDAY, 24 JULY 2014

Councillors Present: Dominic Boeck, Hilary Cole, Roger Croft, Marcus Franks, Alan Law, Gordon Lundie, Irene Neill and Graham Pask

Also Present: Bill Blackett (Revenues and Benefits Manager), Nick Carter (Chief Executive), Mark Evans (Head of Children's Services), David Holling (Head of Legal Services), Gary Lugg (Head of Planning & Countryside), Keith Ulyatt (Public Relations Manager), Caroline Walsh (Special Projects Officer), Rachael Wardell (Corporate Director - Communities), Stephen Chard (Policy Officer), Councillor Roger Hunneman, Councillor Royce Longton, Councillor Alan Macro, Councillor Gwen Mason, Robin Steel (Group Executive (Cons)), Councillor Quentin Webb and Councillor Keith Woodhams

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: John Ashworth, Councillor Pamela Bale and Councillor Joe Mooney

PART I

14. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2014 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

15. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

16. Public Questions

There were no public questions submitted.

17. Petitions

Mr Bob Morgan presented a petition containing 113 signatures which requested an alteration to the speed limit set from Thornford Road in Thatcham to the junction of Crookham Park Home site in order to improve road safety. The petition was referred to the Head of Highways and Transport for a response.

18. Non-Domestic Rates - Reoccupation Relief (EX2845)

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 6) which sought to establish a council policy for the granting of this form of rate relief.

Councillor Alan Law explained that reoccupation relief was introduced by the Chancellor in his Autumn Statement with an intention of encouraging thriving and diverse town centres, and reducing the number of vacant shops. Reoccupation relief would provide a 50% business rate discount for 18 months for businesses moving into previously empty retail premises between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2016.

The operation of a reoccupation relief scheme was not mandatory, but the Executive was asked to allow this form of relief. Councillor Law made the point that the scheme would be 100% funded by the Government and would not therefore be a cost to the residents of West Berkshire.

Councillor Roger Hunneman gave his full support to the recommendation to allow this form of relief.

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Councillor Alan Macro also welcomed the recommendation. He did however refer to paragraph 2.4 of the report which stated that relief would be available for 18 months subject to the property remaining continuously occupied and asked what constituted 'continuously occupied'. Bill Blackett confirmed that this was occupation for a minimum period of 18 months.

RESOLVED that the Council would allow this form of relief to eligible cases identified in accordance with guidance issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Reason for the decision: This form of relief has been recently introduced and the decision to allow such a relief scheme is left to the discretion of billing authorities.

Other options considered: None.

19. **'Delivering Investment from Sustainable Development' Supplementary Planning Document - Update (EX2821)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 7) which sought Member approval for a new draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for developer contributions following the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

Councillor Hilary Cole explained that CIL would apply to any planning applications determined on or after April 2015 and from that date, the use of S106 agreements would be restricted. It was therefore necessary to update the SPD for developer contributions to reflect the effect of the implementation of CIL.

The summary of proposed changes to the SPD was provided in paragraph 4.5 of the report and these were incorporated in the draft SPD which was appended to the report.

The report proposed approval of the draft SPD prior to public consultation. Subject to approval, consultation would run from 25 July 2014 to 12 September 2014. Post consultation, Officers would make appropriate changes to the document and a report proposing adoption of the SPD was scheduled to be taken to a meeting of Council in December 2014.

Councillor Cole confirmed that the draft SPD had been considered and approved by the Planning Policy Task Group.

Councillor Keith Woodhams thanked Officers, in particular Caroline Walsh, for their efforts in producing this document. He was pleased to note in the Transport Topic Paper in the draft SPD that site specific infrastructure would remain eligible for S106 contributions.

Councillor Roger Hunneman asked for confirmation on how frequently S106 contributions could be sought once CIL had been introduced.

Councillor Cole took the opportunity to also thank Caroline Walsh for all her efforts and asked her to respond to Councillor Hunneman's question.

Caroline Walsh explained that post the implementation of CIL in April 2015, the pooling of contributions sought through a S106 agreement would be limited to five planning obligations for a clearly defined project or type of infrastructure since April 2010. Currently this was unrestricted.

Councillor Alan Macro queried whether the Council would be able to revert to its S106 scheme rather than CIL should this become a possibility. Councillor Cole felt this would be relatively straightforward.

Councillor Macro then referred to Appendix B – the CIL Regulation 123 list which described how the use of planning obligations for infrastructure that would be funded in

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whole or in part by the CIL would be restricted to avoid duplication between CIL and S106 contributions. This document explained that the developer contributions SPD had been revised in order that it applied only to specific on site infrastructure or direct mitigation measures required as a result of a large scale development. Councillor Macro's question was whether there was potential for S106 contributions to be pooled from a number of smaller scale developments.

In response, Caroline Walsh explained that once the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document was finalised, the Regulation 123 list would be revised to clearly explain what S106 contributions would be sought from those sites.

Councillor Macro then asked whether S106 contributions could be sought for planning applications where public open space was a requirement. Caroline Walsh confirmed that S106 requirements for open space could still be sought beyond April 2015 if new provision was required on-site as part of a housing development for a minimum of ten dwellings.

RESOLVED that the draft SPD be approved prior to public consultation.

Reason for the decision: To allow the creation and adoption of a new SPD to come into force alongside the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Levy ("CIL").

Other options considered: Not to update the policy guidance.

20. **Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Proposal (EX2876)**

The Executive considered a report (Agenda Item 8) which advised of the extent and impact of the recruitment and retention problems faced by Children's Services and which set out a costed strategy to address them.

Councillor Irene Neill explained that the proposed Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Strategy aimed to provide an attractive package to Children's Social Workers in what was noted as being a stressful occupation. The offer of a higher basic salary alone was not sufficient and a number of proposed benefits were included in the package. These included:

- Retention bonus and retention leave.
- Assistance with potential relocation costs and with ensuring access to the most appropriate transportation.
- Establishment of a Social Work Academy to provide mentoring and training for new Social Workers.

There had been an increasing reliance on agency staff, but the quality of these workers was becoming more difficult to guarantee. Permanent employees would provide greater stability and help to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and young people.

Recruitment and retention in this area was an issue in many local authorities and there was a degree of competition for Social Workers.

Councillor Neill stated that it was imperative to do all that was possible in order to recruit and retain good quality Social Workers. Therefore, endorsement was sought from the Executive to the drafted strategy as well as agreement to the one off use of general fund reserves of £311k in the current financial year together with increasing ongoing investment from 2015/16 to continue to implement the strategy and ensure the safety of West Berkshire's vulnerable children and young people. Regular reports would be provided to the Executive on progress with the implementation of these proposals if approval was granted.

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Councillor Neill then referred to the debate held on this issue by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission (OSMC) on 21 July 2014 and their recommendation that the Executive give strong consideration for the proposed recruitment specialist to be paid partly by basic salary and partly by results for the achievement of set targets. Councillor Neill felt that this was an area that could be considered in more detail.

Councillor Roger Hunneman referred to the OSMC addendum paper which was produced following the special meeting on 21 July 2014 which, as well as making the recommendation referred to by Councillor Neill, listed some key points from the debate which Councillor Hunneman hoped could be taken on board.

In responding to the key points listed in the OSMC report, Councillor Gordon Lundie confirmed that 'funds earmarked for preventative work' were not proposed to be used for the Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

The OSMC's strong support to the introduction of the Social Work Academy was welcomed and Councillor Lundie advised that West Berkshire would be one of the first local authorities to do so.

In terms of the specific recommendation in relation to the recruitment specialist, Councillor Lundie agreed this would be considered. He did however point out that attracting an individual to the post would be more difficult if the salary was partly based on performance. Councillor Lundie also raised a concern that pay by performance might lead the specialist to concentrate on getting people into post, rather than on the quality of those people. Rachael Wardell added that it was the intention to monitor the performance of the recruitment specialist as with other employees.

Finally, Councillor Lundie advised that this issue had been highlighted on the Risk Register and this had resulted in action already being taken to improve the social work career structure.

Councillor Alan Macro suggested that the number of agency workers in West Berkshire could be a useful performance indicator. Councillor Roger Croft agreed to give this consideration.

(Post meeting note: a non-targeted measure on the proportion of posts filled by agency workers would be added as a Key Accountable Volume Measure in the Council's 2014/15 performance framework).

Councillor Hunneman added his surprise at the high cost of agency workers in comparison to permanently employed staff. The use of agency workers should therefore be avoided where possible.

Councillor Lundie agreed that costs were high and this was a factor to consider on an ongoing basis. However, it was likely that the use of agency workers would continue to be necessary in order to ensure the safety of vulnerable children and young people in this challenging and complex area of work. Councillor Lundie felt that there was potential to explore Berkshire wide agency provision in future.

RESOLVED that the drafted strategy be endorsed and the one off use of general fund reserves of £311k in current financial year be agreed along with the increasing ongoing investment required from 2015/16 to implement the strategy.

Reason for the decision: This issue is already impacting on the Council's ability to provide a safe and effective child protection service. If action is not taken this position will weaken still further. In addition to this the Council's current position could contribute significantly to a poor outcome to an Ofsted Inspection (which is due imminently) which would result in significantly higher costs and reputational damage to the Council.

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Other options considered: A wide range of other options have been explored in previous reports. This report sets out the best option in terms of the likely effectiveness balanced against affordability and value for money.

21. Members' Questions

There were no Member questions submitted.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00pm and closed at 5.29pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature