

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2015 FROM 7.30 PM TO 7.40 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Keith Baker (Chairman), Charlotte Haitham Taylor, John Kaiser, Philip Mirfin, Anthony Pollock and Angus Ross

Other Councillors Present

Alistair Auty
Prue Bray
Bob Wyatt

77. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Pauline Jorgensen and Julian McGhee-Sumner.

Councillors Alistair Auty and Bob Wyatt attended the meeting on behalf of Councillors Jorgensen and McGhee-Sumner. In accordance with legislation they could take part in any discussions but were not entitled to vote.

78. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 October 2015 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

79. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Councillor Anthony Pollock declared a personal interest in Item 82, Council Owned Companies' Business, by virtue of the fact that he was an unpaid Non-Executive Director of Optalis. Councillor Pollock remained in the meeting during discussions and voted on the matter.

Councillor Alistair Auty, who was in attendance to answer questions on behalf of the Executive Member for Resident Services, declared a personal interest in Item 82, Council Owned Companies' Business, by virtue of the fact that he was a paid Non-Executive Director of Wokingham Housing Ltd and Loddon Homes Ltd. Councillor Auty remained in the meeting during discussions.

80. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

81. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

81.1 Prue Bray asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Agenda item 82 includes a report from WHL which gives an update on progress on the development of Phoenix Avenue. The first part of the project was to demolish Eustace Crescent. It is my understanding that while WHL commissioned the demolition contract, they were not directly responsible for it. WHL intended the outcome of the demolition contract to be that the site was left ready for construction to start. However, a large

amount of demolition debris has been left on site and needs to be removed, at considerable unforeseen additional cost. Could you please explain how this happened?

Answer

The decision to approve the demolition and the cost thereof was taken by the Executive in May 2012. The demolition work was actually carried out in 2014 and the contract for the building of Phoenix Avenue was awarded in 2015.

This whole project is controlled by a Project Board including representatives from WHL, Tenant Services, Property Services and others. They defined the brief for the demolition. At the time, back in 2012/2013, the specific requirements of WHL for the new build were not sufficiently advanced to inform the brief. That did not occur until much later after it had been demolished.

In the absence of a detailed brief, specifically around some of the debris, the demolition contractor was instructed by the Project Board to spread the hard core over the wet and muddy site including the voids and depressions left from the removal of the foundations.

A year on from this, after the land had settled following the distribution of that hard core in 2014, the site now has to be tidied up for building work to commence.

The original budget for the demolition had a contingency element which is quite normal in these cases, especially when the specific requirements of the new build are not defined and unlikely to be defined for 12 months. The estimated cost of the additional work means the total expenditure is within that contingency element. Clearly every effort will be made to reduce the final cost through negotiation but it is always helpful if contingencies are not used but they are in place to handle such circumstances.

But the real story here is of an ambitious Council working creatively to deliver 68 much-needed affordable homes to rent in Wokingham Borough.

Supplementary Question

As you know we very much support this project and we want it to be successful as we do want all the affordable housing projects that the Council is engaged in to be successful. So I suppose my supplementary is: it is a relief that we can contain the cost but this appears to have fallen slightly between two or three stools, shall we say.

Have any learning points been learnt from this and will you make sure that we don't make the same mistakes again so that in future, and hopefully there will be many projects to come, we end up doing it properly?

Supplementary Answer

Clearly the Project Board, which includes all the relevant people and has done from day one are actively looking at how this was handled and how it was managed and any learnings from that will obviously be taken on board.

82. COUNCIL OWNED COMPANIES' BUSINESS

(Councillors Anthony Pollock and Alistair Auty declared personal interests in this item)

The Executive considered a report relating to an update on the operational position of the companies for the period up to 31 October 2015 and the budget monitoring position for the month ending 30 September 2015.

The Executive Member for Children's Services queried the timescales for approval of Loddon Homes' application to register as a for-profit registered provider. Councillor Auty, in his capacity as a non-Executive Director of Loddon Homes, advised that the Homes and Communities Agency had not provided a definitive timescale but it was hoped that it would be within the first quarter of next year.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the budget monitoring position for the month ending 30 September 2015 be noted;
- 2) the operational update for the period to 31 October 2015 be noted.

83. FEES AND CHARGES

The Executive considered a report containing a schedule of proposed fees and charges for Council services.

The Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance informed the meeting that the fees and charges were being brought to the Executive earlier than in previous years and this was to enable the majority of them to be enacted sooner thereby increasing revenue which would assist with the Council's budgetary pressures.

The Executive Member for Environment welcomed bringing the fees and charges at an earlier stage as it allowed for seasonal charges eg fishing licenses to come in at an appropriate time. With regard to fees and charges related to country parks it was noted that extensive benchmarking had been undertaken which had resulted in some prices being decreased, which it was hoped would bring in additional income. Councillor Ross advised that although season tickets had gone up many of them still represented one visit a week over the year so it was believed that they were still good value. In addition it was being considered whether quarterly season tickets could be made available to those people who were seasonal in their use of the country parks.

RESOLVED: That the schedule of fees and charges, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved to be effective from the dates listed on the schedule.