

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
SPECIAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
HELD ON 30 MAY 2019 FROM 8.00 PM TO 8.22 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Bill Soane (Chairman), Prue Bray, Lindsay Ferris, John Kaiser and Wayne Smith

Other Councillors Present

Councillors: Rachel Bishop-Firth, UllaKarin Clark, Pauline Jorgensen, Stuart Munro, Gregor Murray, Imogen Shepherd-DuBey and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Bill Soane was elected Chairman of the Special Council Executive Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN

Malcolm Richards was appointed Vice Chairman of the Special Council Executive Committee for the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Halsall, Clive Jones and Malcolm Richards.

Councillor Prue Bray substituted for Councillor Jones and Councillor Wayne Smith substituted for Councillor Halsall.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Special Council Executive Committee held on 14 August 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

6. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no public questions received.

7. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no Member questions received.

8. FUTURE HOUSING CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report from the Executive in relation to a proposed consultation on future housing numbers in Wokingham Borough.

Councillor Bray, whilst confirming that she was in support of the consultation which she felt should be undertaken on an all-party basis, queried what level of response would be seen as successful and what would happen if the expected number of responses were not received? Councillor Smith stated that it was difficult to predict how many responses would be received however he hoped, given the number of people who had recently signed petitions relating to housing in the Borough and from discussions with resident

groups etc that in excess of 15,000 would respond. In addition he hoped that all Members would encourage their residents to respond to the consultation.

Councillor Bray felt the proposed question was not the right one as it was only asking whether people agreed with the housing figure and didn't take account of whether people agreed with the figure because they felt it was too high or too low. She felt that if this finding was presented to the Government they could argue that the Council had not got complete validation from residents as they might have answered it the other way. Councillor Bray therefore proposed that the question be reworded to say "is the current target for the Borough too high, about right or too low" as this would give more clarity to the final outcome. A box asking "why do you think that" would be useful as this might provide additional supporting evidence that could be presented to the Government.

Councillor Ferris agreed with Councillor Bray's comments as although he believed that the sentiment of the question was right he too felt that more work was needed on the wording. He too did not want something presented to the Government that would enable them to argue against the findings. The question had to be really clear and simple in order that the answer coming out was not ambiguous.

Councillor Bray asked that information explaining how the housing targets were derived at, and who they were imposed by, should be included in the consultation preamble. This could also include an explanation of the number of houses the Council was expected to build and the number of houses that had been built so that a comparison could be shown. Councillor Smith acknowledged the point that was being made but highlighted the complicated nature of how the targets were derived at and how difficult it was to explain this which was why a single question was being proposed.

In relation to the cost of the consultation, which was shown as £45k-80k in the report, Councillor Bray queried what the breakdown of this figure was including how much the costs were for: creating the mailshot; distribution; publicity; postage replies and processing the replies as there were different ways of undertaking the consultation which would impact the costs.

Councillor Bray also queried information within the report which she felt was contradictory. In one bullet point it stated "postcards or letter with freepost response provided to be sent directly to all households..." while another bullet point stated that "responses will be submitted through an online survey". Given that it was cheaper to administer and process she felt the consultation should state that the Council would prefer people to take part in the online survey, but acknowledged that there needed to be an option for people who did not have online facilities. Councillor Smith confirmed that the Council would prefer people to respond online but there had been a very strong feeling amongst Members that a pre-paid envelope should be provided in order to maximise the responses.

Councillor Bray put forward the idea of including the consultation on the front of the Borough News so that people could cut out the response form and return them, possibly into boxes placed in the libraries, rather than posting them back which would save postage and the cost of printing the postcards. Taking account of the fact that it was intended to include a unique reference number on the postcard Councillor Bray suggested that there were a number of online tools eg change.org or Survey Monkey that had the facility for unique responses to be made which would allow the same home address to have different responses but not allow the same e-mail address to be used, which she believed would provide sufficient level of control. She also felt that asking residents to type in a unique

reference number when completing the consultation online was adding a layer of complication that might put people off completing the consultation or could lead to errors when inputting the number.

Councillor Smith confirmed that the consultation would be included on the front page of the Borough News however the Council was unsure of how many residents actually read the Borough News and therefore a large number of residents could be missed if that was the only form of communication. He also felt that the implications of not using a unique number needed to be understood. Councillor Smith clarified that the proposal was that the letter sent to residents would include a unique number which they would use if going online and which would already be on the return slip.

Councillor Bray also asked that consideration be given to the GDPR consent wording that would be included on the consultation response form as she wanted to ensure that it would provide the requisite consent for any data arising from the Consultation to be sent to the Government and any other uses the Council might wish to use the information. She also asked that if the intention was to carry out the consultation over the summer that it not be confined to the school holiday period.

In order to make the consultation truly cross-party Councillor Bray proposed an amendment to recommendation 3 as follows:

“authorise the Director of Corporate Services and Director Locality and Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council **and the Leaders of the other Groups**, to agree minor amendments, if necessary, prior to consultation.”

The amendment was agreed by the Committee.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the future housing consultation, in the form set out in paragraph 3.1, be approved;
- 2) a supplementary estimate of £45,000-£80,000 be authorised to fund the consultation;
- 3) the Director of Corporate Services and Director Locality and Customer Services, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Leaders of the other Groups, be authorised to agree minor amendments, if necessary, prior to consultation.