

BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD

EXECUTIVE

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at the New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate on 18 April 2019 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors M. A. Brunt (Leader), G. J. Knight (Deputy Leader), R. H. Ashford, J. E. Durrant, K. Foreman, A. C. J. Horwood, E. Humphreys and T. Schofield.

Also present: Councillors M. S. Blacker and C. T. H. Whinney.

129. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Executive meeting held on 18 March 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

130. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Executive Members: Councillor Mrs N.J. Bramhall.

Non-Executive Members: Councillor Mrs R. Absalom and Councillor N.D. Harrison.

131. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

132. STREET NAMING AND NUMBERING POLICY

Councillor K. Foreman, Executive Member for Planning Policy, invited the Executive to consider replacing the Council's existing Street Naming and Numbering Policy. The Executive was informed that a revised policy, set out in Annex 1 to the report presented, would improve opportunities for naming tributes to the deceased, particularly fallen service personnel.

In response to questions it was acknowledged that the existing policy was not flexible enough. For example, it was silent on naming tributes for service personnel and required a period of 70 years to have elapsed before names based on any deceased individual could be used.

As set out in the report presented, Councillor Foreman explained that a recent tribute to Guardsman James Hill, who had been killed in the Afghanistan conflict in 2009, had required a 'Strong Leader' decision. It was agreed that this had illustrated the inflexibility of the existing policy and had raised concerns amongst Councillors.

The Executive was asked to note that the revised policy removed the time period before which a tribute could be made to fallen service personnel. In order to show appreciation to other notable local residents the revised policy also proposed to reduce the period after which anyone could be recognised for memorial naming

from 70 to 40 years. In response to questions about the change to 40 years it was highlighted that this allowed time to monitor public sentiment and was based on national guidelines, good practice and peer-research. It was noted that it would always remain possible to take 'Strong Leader' decisions in the event that further flexibility was required for other unknown circumstances.

Councillor Foreman also informed the Executive that the revised policy had been improved to counteract operational issues that had been faced when registering new properties. It was noted that these changes would remove obstructions in Council Tax and Waste Collection which would help to improve operational efficiency in these areas and maintenance of the Council's central address database.

The Executive Member for Planning Policy concluded by noting that the revised policy provided a sound framework for the consideration of future Street Naming and Numbering applications.

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The existing Street Naming and Numbering Policy (dated October 2016) be revoked.
- (ii) The revised Street Naming and Numbering Policy, set out in Annex 1 to the report presented, be adopted.
- (iii) The delegation, set out in the Council's Constitution under Part 3b: Officer Scheme of Delegation (paragraphs 8.13, 8.14 and 8.15), with reference to street naming and numbering be reaffirmed to the relevant Head of Service.

Reason for decision: The existing Street Naming and Numbering Policy (dated October 2016) did not allow for naming tributes to recently-fallen service personnel. Neither did it clarify the Council's operational need to allocate addresses in certain circumstances. The 70 year rule for memorial naming had also exhausted the supply of locally historic and geographically appropriate names.

Alternative options: To retain the existing Street Naming and Numbering Policy.

133. STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Councillor K. Foreman, Executive Member for Planning Policy, submitted a report seeking approval for a revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

The Executive was informed that the SCI set out how and when the Council would engage with stakeholders and residents on issues relating to planning, including the determination of planning applications and the preparation of planning policy documents.

It was noted that although the structure of the document had been updated to improve readability, the revised SCI, set out in Annex 1 of the report presented, did not propose any substantive change to the Council's overall approach to, and principles for, consultation and engagement, both of which were considered to remain sound.

It was noted that:

- The previous SCI had been adopted in October 2013.
- The Council was required to review and, where necessary update, the document every five years.
- Certain aspects of the SCI had been updated to reflect legislative changes. For example, the introduction of new types of planning approvals and new requirements around Neighbourhood Planning.
- The revised SCI reflected the general shift in relation to the Council's approach to customer contact, including an increased use of online services, digital information and social media in order to maximise engagement with residents.
- Planning Enforcement was dealt with briefly in the SCI because this was covered more fully in the Council's Local Enforcement Plan.

During the discussion both the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Planning Policy responded to various issues, including questions concerning who and how the Council would consult once a planning application had been submitted.

Councillor Foreman concluded by confirming that the revised SCI provided a clear, but flexible, framework for the Council to meet (and in many cases exceed) the minimum requirements for consultation on planning policies and applications. It was also highlighted that its adoption would ensure the Council met its statutory obligations.

RESOLVED that the revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), set out in Annex 1 of the report presented, be adopted and take effect immediately.

Reason for decision: The Council is required to prepare and maintain a Statement of Community Involvement setting out how it will engage the community on planning issues.

Alternative options: To not adopt the revised Statement of Community Involvement or to adopt the documents with specified amendments.

134. EMPTY HOMES POLICY

Councillor G.J. Knight, Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Benefits, introduced the report as set out.

The Executive was informed that in accordance with the Local Government Act 2012, local authorities had been able to charge a Council Tax premium in respect of properties that had been empty for more than two years. It was noted that the Council had implemented this policy from April 2013, along with other changes to local Council Tax discounts, and had been charging owners of long term empty properties an additional amount equivalent to 50% of their Council Tax liability. In other words, these owners had been paying 150% Council Tax.

Councillor Knight went on to explain that new proposals, permitted under the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, allowed local authorities to increase this additional charge, or premium, to an amount equivalent to 100% of the Council Tax liability. The Executive was also asked to note that where a domestic property had been empty for over five years, the premium could be increased to 200% of the Council Tax charge.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing and Benefits highlighted that the Council was committed to addressing the housing shortage across the borough and explained that the proposals set out in the report presented one way to do this. It was explained that increasing the Council Tax charge for empty properties would help to reduce the number of empty homes by incentivising owners to bring their properties back into use.

The following points were noted:

- As of 9 April 2019, the number of domestic properties that had been empty for over six months was 401. This included all properties that had been empty for at least 6 months, and included 60 which were classed as “long term empty” and were already paying the 50% additional Council Tax premium. It was noted that only long term empty properties would attract the 100% premium.
- As of 9 April 2019, there were 123 empty offices or business premises and 14 empty flats situated above retail outlets.
- The Council’s housing officers were committed to providing help and advice to home owners about letting their properties.
- There were already discretionary powers in place, to reduce the charges as appropriate, where an owner was likely to experience financial hardship as a result of the changes.

It was also noted that the additional Council Tax provided a secondary benefit by raising revenue which would be used to help borough residents.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) **The Council agree that from 1 April 2020 homes that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for more than two years and less than five years be charged a Council Tax long term empty premium equivalent to 100% of the Council Tax in addition to their current Council Tax.**
- (ii) **The Council agree that from 1 April 2020, homes that have been empty and substantially unfurnished for five years and more be charged a Council Tax long term empty premium equivalent to 200% of the Council Tax.**

Reason for decision: To help reduce the number of empty homes by incentivising owners to bring their properties back into use.

Alternative options: To not apply an increase or to only apply the increase of 100% to all long term empty properties from April 2020, and to further consider the additional increase in subsequent years in respect of properties empty for five years or more.

135. UPDATE - DEVELOPMENT OF LEE STREET HORLEY SITE

This item was withdrawn by the Chief Executive before the meeting.

136. PROPERTY ACQUISITIONS

There was no business to be considered under this agenda item.

137. STATEMENTS

The Leader of the Council, Councillor M.A. Brunt indicated that this was the last meeting of the Executive in the Municipal Year and thanked all Members and Officers for their support during the year.

138. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

139. EXEMPT BUSINESS

There was no exempt business to be considered.

140. UPDATE - DEVELOPMENT OF LEE STREET HORLEY SITE (EXEMPT)

This item was withdrawn by the Chief Executive before the meeting.

141. PROPERTY ACQUISITIONS (EXEMPT)

There was no exempt business to be considered under this agenda item.

The Meeting closed at 7.57 pm