

## **BOROUGH OF REIGATE AND BANSTEAD**

### **EXECUTIVE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held at the New Council Chamber - Town Hall, Reigate on 16 November 2023.

Present: Councillors R. Biggs (Leader), V. H. Lewanski (Deputy Leader), R. H. Ashford, H. Avery, A. King, R. Michalowski, N. C. Moses and C. M. Neame

Also present: Councillors P. Chandler, J. Essex, N. Harrison, S. Kulka, S. McKenna, S. Sinden

#### **32. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the previous meeting on 14 September 2023 were approved.

#### **33. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor James King, Executive Member for Corporate Policy and Resources.

#### **34. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### **35. RESPONSE TO PETITION - 'SAVE CHRISTMAS IN REDHILL'**

The Leader welcomed the petitioner and Redhill resident, Mr Elliott Wragg, to the meeting to present the petition – 'Save Christmas in Redhill' – which had been signed by over 200 people both online and in hard copy. The petition asked for funding to support the cost of Christmas decorations in Redhill town centre as the regeneration and investment in the town continued to make it the focal point for East Surrey.

Mr Wragg thanked Executive Members for considering the petition which he was presenting as a substitute on behalf of the petitioner, Ms Jen Orchard. She could not attend the meeting and had sent her apologies. He thanked residents who had signed the petition which was a very important matter to Redhill residents. He said that a few days after the petition had started, the funding gap had been solved. A Christmas tree was up in the town centre which was great to see. A meeting of local businesses that make up the Redhill Business Guild had been very informative. Mr Wragg thanked all parties who had contributed to that event.

As a resident who has recently moved to the area, he raised other issues that concerned neighbours such as the parking outside McDonalds, temporary closure

of toilets in the park and lack of monitored CCTV for the town centre. He appreciated the complexities of these different items but said he hoped that these could be solved with ingenuity and cooperation within the council and local businesses to look forward to a happier, safer and brighter Redhill for the 50th anniversary of the borough.

The Leader, Councillor Biggs, said that planning work for Christmas celebrations in the borough by the Council and local businesses started at the beginning of the year. It was important that the Council gets right how it spends its limited resources across all the other major town centres. For example, there are over 30 shopping parades across Banstead, Redhill, Reigate and Horley and it would not be a simple solution or fair to other areas to provide funding for one but not another. He welcomed calls or emails from residents if there were issues, before a public petition. The draft budget demonstrated how the Council would need to stop doing some of the services it was doing in order to fund festive lights. In past years, some funding had been secured just after the Covid-19 pandemic. Previously Surrey County Councillors in Redhill had also contributed to the Redhill Christmas lights using the SCC community fund. Redhill Business Guild as well as other town centre organisations had also secured discretionary funding for improving the vitality of town centres.

He noted that partnership working with local businesses generally helped to fund Christmas lights and decorations. The Belfry Shopping Centre and the Redhill Business Guild had worked together on this although he acknowledged there had been a recent change of ownership of The Belfry so there had been a slow start, but this was now resolved. In other areas, for example in Horley, the Horley Business Guild and the Horley Association of Traders had started fundraising for Christmas lights from April.

There were no further comments from Executive Members.

Visiting Members made the following observations:

- **Local businesses in Redhill** - the business community had funded the large Christmas tree that was now up in Redhill town centre. Support had been given to the Belfry Shopping Centre manager to bring the business community together to fund the decorations. Local taxi companies and The Light cinema had come forward and there was hope that more businesses would offer support, such as Sainsburys, which is Redhill's largest retailer. In the past, some local Surrey County Councillors had part contributed to the decorations using the community fund which had been available to them as County Councillors.
- **Christmas hope** – the Christmas message should be less about festive lights and more a story of hope. Christmas was about building a sense of wellbeing and shared beliefs. The Council should continue to invest in and recognise the meaning of Christmas and other faiths. Residents were facing fuel poverty and cost of living pressures so needed to face challenging times together.
- **Banstead Christmas lights** – in the north of the Borough, it was noted that shopkeepers in Banstead village had found it difficult to continue to provide funding that they had done over previous years. Christmas lights had been supported by a similar county council grant from the Banstead county

councillor and an appeal by the Residents' Association to support the Christmas lights.

- **Redhill Business Guild** - as a result of the publicity around the petition, new businesses had joined Redhill Business Guild which had been a positive development.

The Leader, Councillor Biggs, thanked local support, The Belfry Centre Manager, Andy Nash, and Chair of the Redhill Business Guild, for the work that they had done on planning for Christmas in the town. The Council had invested huge amounts of money into Redhill redevelopment. The town was going from strength to strength and residents and visitors could look forward to taking part in the coming Christmas festivities.

**It was RESOLVED – that the Executive:**

- (i) **Noted the petition and recommended that the approach the Council has to supporting Christmas activities remains unchanged.**

### **36. SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING 2024/25**

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance, Governance and Organisation, Councillor Lewanski, introduced the report and annexes - Service & Financial Planning 2024/25 which was published as part of the Executive agenda pack on the Council's website. The report and annexes set out the draft Revenue Budget proposals for 2024/25 and Capital Programme proposals for 2024/25 to 2028/29.

Councillor Lewanski said that local government as a whole was facing continued financial challenges. However, Reigate and Banstead Borough Council was confident of balancing its budget for 2024/25 as it had avoided high levels of external debt and reserves remained buoyant. It had nevertheless been challenging over the summer to produce a set of draft budget proposals for 2024/25.

The Financial Sustainability Programme had helped Executive Members and Officers continue in-depth reviews of spending plans and sources of income. This was supported by service plans that set out how each service will operate and what they plan to achieve over the coming year. This work had led to a full and robust assessment of what the Council does and how it is funded. Service budget growth requirements were relatively modest, mainly reflecting unavoidable cost increases. Wherever possible savings proposals had been identified that have few direct impacts on service delivery. However, that continued to be a challenge in the current economic climate.

There had been an in-depth review of fees & charges for all services. This had identified opportunities to adjust existing budgets to reflect forecast income levels and increase fees in line with the recommended Policy.

The Deputy Leader said that the Council was very mindful of the potential impacts when making budget decisions and they will, as they do every year, consult widely on the proposals in this report before making final decisions in February. The final budget position will depend on the outcome of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023 and the Local Government Settlement

announcement in December. The Budget report to Council in February will reflect any further changes that are identified as a result.

In addition the Budget report highlights potential risks and issues that may cause the Council to draw on the Reserves that have been earmarked to address them. These include the continued risk of reducing housing benefit subsidy and grants.

### **Medium Term Financial Plan**

This report also included the updated five year Medium Term forecasts, reflecting the work that had been completed over recent months to map the potential impacts of increasing costs and reductions in Government funding over the next five years. While the forecast gap remains potentially significant if action is not taken to address it, the MTFP and supporting strategies provide a solid framework for future financial planning.

### **Reserves**

As set out in the report, the Revenue Reserves are more than sufficient to support the Budget and mitigate potential risks. Focus remains on developing new income streams and reducing costs through the Financial Sustainability Programme and an approved Reserves Policy.

### **Council Tax Increase**

The Council Tax proposals set out in the report are to increase the Reigate & Banstead element of the average Band D charge by less than 15 pence per week, being a £7.47 increase overall at the 2.99% level. This is subject to confirmation of the Government's referendum limit in the Provisional Local Government Settlement in December and approval by full Council in February.

The report also confirmed new recommendations to increase the Local Council Tax Support scheme for residents next year. This follows the planned review of the scheme during 2023/24. There were also recommendations to change council tax premiums on empty properties which arise from the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill which received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023.

### **Capital Programme**

The Capital Programme included several new capital schemes to support delivery of the Council's Environmental Strategy, many of which have been enabled through the allocation of Strategic CIL funding.

### **Next steps**

The Revenue Budget and Capital Programme proposals in this report will go forward for consideration by the O&S Budget Scrutiny Panel on 29 November 2023 and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 7 December 2023 before the final budget is brought back to the Executive on 1 February 2024.

The Leader of the Council, Richard Biggs, thanked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Governance and Organisation and all Executive Members as well as the Chief Finance Officer, Finance team and Heads of Service for their work on the draft Budget which had taken place since the summer.

There were no further observations from Executive Members who had been closely involved in Budget discussions in each of their portfolios.

Visiting Member and Overview & Scrutiny Committee Chairman, Councillor Harrison, confirmed that there was an O&S Budget Scrutiny Panel meeting at the end of November, followed by a meeting of Overview & Scrutiny Committee to examine the draft Budget on 7 December 2023. Councillor Harrison noted that this Council was in a strong position compared to many others. He said that to have a report that shows a balanced position was commendable. The Budget Scrutiny Panel and O&S Committee would be looking at the increases and savings proposed as well as use of balances and reserves to test the potential risks. Committee Members would also review how the previous year finished and what it means for services in the coming year.

The Leader, Councillor Biggs, acknowledged the scrutiny work that would take place to review the draft Budget by O&S Members.

Additionally, Visiting Members made observations and asked questions on the following points:

- **Council Tax** – they noted the proposed increases to Council Tax and to fees & charges to residents. They welcomed the review of the Local Council Tax support scheme to help the most vulnerable residents and increases in Council Tax on second homes and empty homes.
- **Proposed savings** – Members noted that some savings were being made by delaying Capital projects and making savings through staff vacancies and asked whether this was serving residents well enough.
- **Environment and Sustainability schemes** – Members welcomed the additional investment proposals and focus on environmental sustainability as set out in the Capital Programme growth 2024/25 onwards. Members asked if the Council was maximising all it could do as set out in the energy audit and whether it was taking forward sufficient opportunities in that report?
- **Energy savings investment** – noted proposals for introducing energy saving measures after high energy costs to make future savings.
- **Waste and recycling** – noted the likely allocation of additional resources to support delivery of the Government's strategy.
- **Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points** – asked whether income from EV charging points was included in the report and reported that local businesses such as taxi drivers were reporting that there were not enough high power charging points in the borough.

Officers confirmed that an update on EV charging points had been included in the Environmental Sustainability Strategy annual report to Executive in September. It was agreed that a further written answer would be provided in response to the questions raised.

Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Finance, Governance and Organisation, Councillor Lewanski, concluded by stating that residents were being served well as they are seeking value for money which was demonstrated in the draft Budget with

core services not being cut. Staffing remains adequate with growth in some key services, for example, the proposal to employ an additional person working on sustainability projects.

The Recommendations were then put to the Executive and it was:

**RESOLVED – that the Executive agreed:**

- (i) That the national and local policy context (Annex 1) and significant financial uncertainties at this stage in the budget-setting process be noted.
- (ii) That the service proposals set out in this report which seek to respond to this context and deliver our corporate priorities, be endorsed.
- (iii) That the draft service business plans for 2024/25 to 2026/27 be approved, and that Heads of Service be authorised to finalise the plans for their service areas in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holders.
- (iv) That the following be approved for consultation under the Council's budget and policy framework:
  - a. Medium Term Financial Plan Forecasts and proposed actions to address the forecast Revenue Budget gap (Annex 2);
  - b. Service Revenue Budget growth proposals totalling £0.943 million, savings of (£1.719) million and additional income of (£0.540) million (Annex 3);
  - c. Continued funding support for Banstead Commons Conservators for a further three years (2024/25 to 2026/27);
  - d. Central Revenue Budget savings and growth proposals totalling (£0.376) million, and £1.75m provision for the 2024/25 pay award (Annex 3);
  - e. Agreement of a new 10 year Section 136 agreement with Horley Town Council;
  - f. Revenue Issues, Risks and Opportunities totalling £0.964 million, to be funded from earmarked Reserves as necessary;
  - g. Revenue Reserve Balances at 1 April 2023 of £35.474 million (Annex 6.1); and
  - h. A forecast balanced Revenue budget for 2024/25, subject to final confirmation of the outstanding items.
- (v) That the Capital Programme Growth proposals totalling £3.976 million (Annex 4) be approved.
- (vi) That the Fees & Charges Policy (Annex 5) be approved.
- (vii) That the Reserves Policy (Annex 6.2) be approved.
- (viii) That the following changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme be approved and adopted from 2024/25:
  - a. Removal of the maximum award of 90% Council Tax liability for 1,800 households and increasing the award to 100%;
  - b. Removal of the minimum requirement for a household to qualify for £5 per week before support is provided;
  - c. Expansion of support awards to cover full Council Tax liability for residents in Bands F to H;
- (ix) That the following changes Council Tax premiums on empty properties be approved and adopted from 2024/25:

- a. **Removal of the empty homes discount of 28-days where a property becomes empty and unfurnished;**
- b. **For empty and furnished second homes – charge 200% council tax after the first 12 months; and**
- c. **For long-term empty properties – commence charging the 100% premium after 12 months.**

### **37. A23 GREAT STREET DESIGN CODE DRAFT SPD**

The Executive Member for Place, Planning and Regulatory Services, Councillor Michalowski, gave an overview of the report: A23 Great Street Design Code Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which was published as part of the agenda pack.

The Design Code covers the area between Redhill and Horley and contains a set of rules and guidance that will provide more certainty for developers and landowners when they look to promote their site in the area. It will also provide an essential tool for the Council as decision maker to be able to assess the design quality of emerging proposals and to dictate the design standard that is expected. The report sought to progress the Code to formal status as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Following Executive agreement, the draft Design Code SPD will go out to public consultation for six weeks between early December 2023 and January 2024. The draft SPD will then be updated to reflect comments received from the public, which will be summarised in the final Consultation Statement to be published alongside the adopted SPD. The A23 Great Street Design Code SPD will then be recommended to the Executive for adoption, currently planned for Spring 2024.

#### **Background**

The National Planning Policy Framework requires local planning authorities to prepare design guides or codes that are consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code. It states these should reflect the local character and design preferences for their area. The recent Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 has strengthened this requirement, requiring every local authority to produce a design code for its area. This will update the Local Distinctiveness and Character Design Guide SPD, updated in 2021, which has provided useful guidance to help steer the design of development proposals to better reflect local character.

The Council benefited from being part of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Pathfinder Programme. Throughout the Pathfinder programme, three public engagement events had taken place. These centre around four principal themes:

- To make the area work better for pedestrians and cyclists;
- To improve access to open spaces and parks;
- To identify opportunities for development; and
- To raise the quality of design.

## Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement included input from Borough Council and Surrey County Council officers as well as comments received from internal groups such as the internal Member and Officer Local Plan Advisory Group (LPAG) and the Leader's meeting.

The Leader, Councillor Biggs, noted the quality of this draft A23 Great Street Design Code SPD. It was a credit to the Council's Planning Department to secure DLUHC Pathfinder funding. He thanked Planning Policy Officers who had undertaken this detailed work as well as Councillor Michalowski for leading the consultation and other Members who had provided early feedback. There were no further comments from Executive Members.

Visiting Members who had taken part in the consultation praised the good start and excellent work so far. Visiting Members at the meeting, also made the following observations and asked questions on these areas:

- **Environmental issues** – it was noted that the Code benefitted all residents, in particular in areas of active travel and cycling to open spaces.
- **Vision for the A23 Great Street** – this set out 12 significant challenges facing communities at a national and international level from an ageing population to a sense of place, from climate crisis to High Streets. However the draft Design Code was not explicit enough about the challenges being addressed by climate change in Part B of the document (Design Codes – Chapter 5 – Nature).
- **Stewardship model** and long term maintenance solutions – this was part of both borough council and parish council remits. Who would be responsible for the budget for maintenance of this area?
- **Electric Vehicle charging points** along A23 corridor – how many were planned as a rough guide and where were the opportunities for drivers of electric vehicles to charge up their cars across the borough.
- **Proposed tall buildings** – It was noted that the proposed Design Code was timely following a previous proposal to redevelop the Redhill station town centre car park with a development. Members asked if this Code could give guidance on what developers can and cannot do with reference to high developments.
- **Borough-wide Design Codes** – what were the future aspirations for other parts of the Borough?
- **Transport** – the Design Code references the local transport plan on walking and cycling. What engagement had there been with Surrey County Council as the lead on Surrey Highways and transport as well as on road carriageways and junctions?
- **Great Street reference** – it was noted that much of the A23 area is rural and in the green belt so Members said the intention should not be to use the Design Code as a mechanism for further development along this street. The Leader assured Members that it had been taken into account that the A23 covered both rural and urban areas. Members would protect the Borough's Green Belt.
- **Plans for Council-owned land** – while this Design Code covered a mixed area between Redhill and Horley – parts of this included pleasant, green



open spaces. How would Council-owned land be protected as the right plan for those areas in the future.

The Portfolio Holder for Place, Planning and Regulatory Services, Councillor Michalowski, welcomed Members' comments. He acknowledged that the issue of climate change was at the forefront of the mind of many residents, and this may come out in the public consultation and review of feedback. On

EV charging points, Councillor Michalowski noted that it was too early to make a specific commitment on detailed EV charging points in the draft Design Code.

Head of Planning, Andrew Benson, said officers would consider the points that had been made at the meeting alongside the feedback from the public consultation. Planning Policy Officers had worked with Surrey County Council on their draft Design Code. It was also aligned with SCC's Healthy Streets for Surrey Design Code. After the public consultation, all feedback will come back to the internal Local Plan Advisory Group (LPAG), so that all responses can be considered through that process. Officers will also discuss feedback with the Council's Sustainability team. It was noted that discussions on the height of future developments needed to be a balance between local areas use of land and the Local Plan.

It had been a useful exercise for Reigate and Banstead Borough Council to carry out this project with DLUHC funding and they were in better place than other local authorities. There was a longer-term ambition to have further Design Codes, but it would be challenging to have one Code for the whole Borough. It was not yet clear how Central Government saw Design Codes working in practice.

The Leader, Councillor Richard Biggs, thanked Members for their questions, and said he looked forward to receiving the public consultation responses early in 2024. It was then:

**RESOLVED – that the Executive:**

- (i) **Approve the A23 Great Street Design Draft Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for public consultation;**
- (ii) **The Head of Planning in consultation with the Executive Member for Place, Planning and Regulatory Services, be authorised to make any necessary minor amendments to the A23 Great Street Design Draft Code Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) prior to consultation.**

**38. STATEMENTS**

There were no Statements given at the meeting.

**39. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**40. EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no Exempt reports or business to discuss.

The Meeting closed at 8.22 pm