

**Minutes of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
15 April 2024 & Carry Over Meeting 23 April 2024**

Present:

Councillor J.R. Sexton (Chair)
Councillor C. Bateson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

M.M. Attewell	M. Gibson	L. E. Nichols
M. Beecher	K.M. Grant	K.E. Rutherford
J.R. Boughtflower	K. Howkins	H.R.D. Williams
J.T.F. Doran	M.J. Lee	

35/24 Apologies and Substitutes

15 April 2024 Meeting:

Apologies were received from Cllrs Button, S Doran and Rybinski.

Cllr Beatty was present as a substitute for Cllr Button and Cllr Buck was present as a substitute for Cllr S Doran.

23 April Carry Over Meeting:

Present:

Councillor J.R. Sexton (Chair)
Councillor C. Bateson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

M. Beecher	K. Howkins	K.E. Rutherford
J.R. Boughtflower	M.J. Lee	
M. Gibson	L.E. Nichols	

Apologies were received from Cllrs Attewell, Button, J Doran, S Doran, Grant, Rybinski & Williams.

Cllr Beatty was present as a substitute for Cllr Button

36/24 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2024 were agreed as a correct record of proceedings.

37/24 Disclosures of Interest

Cllrs Attewell and Sexton advised that they were also Surrey County Councillors.

Cllr Nichols advised that he was a Director on the Knowle Green Estates Board.

38/24 Questions from members of the Public

There were none.

39/24 Unreasonably persistent, vexatious or abusive Complaints Policy

The Committee considered a report that sought approval to adopt an Unreasonably Persistent, Vexatious or Abusive Complaints Policy.

Committee requested that the third recommendation in the proposed policy be amended to include the Chair of the Corporate policy & Resources Committee.

The Chair asked the Committee to submit any proposed amendments to the Group Head of Commissioning & Transformation by the end of the working day Friday 19 April 2024.

Committee **resolved** to:

1. Agree the Council adopting an Unreasonably Persistent, Vexatious or Abusive Complaints Policy as outlined in the report,
2. Delegate to the Monitoring Officer to make any consequential changes to the Complaints Policy arising from the adoption of this policy; and
3. Delegate to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Corporate Policy & Resources Committee, to implement any future changes and updates to the Council's complaints policy and procedure, including the Unreasonably Persistent, Vexatious or Abusive Complaints Policy.

40/24 Calendar of Meetings 2024/25

The Committee considered a report that outlined the proposed Calendar of Meetings for 2024/25.

The Committee **resolved** to recommend to Council that they approve the report and either Appendix 1 or 2 dependant on whether the proposed new committee structure was approved or not.

41/24 Biodiversity Net Gain Sites

The Committee considered a report that sought approval of the creation of Habitat Banks on identified Spelthorne Borough land for the purpose of Biodiversity Net Gain.

The Committee were advised that the land identified was due to their potential to offer units to developer. They would also suit enhancement to address the fact that they, at present, do not have a good level of biodiversity. Reassurance was given that any land identified would continue to remain under the ownership of the Council and that any enhancement works would need to be agreed.

The Committee **resolved** to approve the creation of Habitat Banks on identified Spelthorne Borough land, for the purpose of Biodiversity Net Gain.

42/24 Debt Write Offs

The Committee considered a report that sought approval for the write-off of outstanding sundry debts.

The Committee were advised that £373,834 of the total amount to be written off related to Housing Benefits overpayments but that this sum was offset by the Housing Benefit Bad Debt Provision.

Lack of adequate resources were cited as one of the reasons that some of these historic debts were on the write-offs list but last year a proper level of resource was put in place to recover ongoing debts. The Committee were advised that there were only certain types of recovery that could be used and that no debt would be recommended for write-off until they had all been exhausted.

The Committee queried whether there were any Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in respect of debt recovery. The Group Head of Commissioning and Transformation advised that currently individual departments within the Council had their own KPIs but work was to commence on unifying these across the Council. The committee requested that a robust debt recovery procedure be produced and implemented across the Council.

Reports would be brought to the committee on a regular basis that would provide up to date figures in respect of outstanding balances that were subject to debt recovery. The report would outline both the amounts and the measures taken to recover the outstanding balances.

The Chair asked for a timeline to reflect the update on the Council wide KIPs for debt recovery and the implementation of a revised recovery measures procedure. The Group Head of Commissioning and Transformation advised that she would provide this at the next meeting of this committee.

The Committee **resolved** to:

Approve the Sundry Debt Write Offs set out in the report, amounting to £383,095 of which £373,834 relates to Housing Benefits overpayments (offset by Housing Benefit Bad Debt Provision on balance sheet of £2,79,952 at 31 March 2023).

43/24 Woodthorpe Road Recreation Playground Refurbishment

The Committee considered a report that sought approval to:

1. Authorise the Group Head of Neighbourhood Services to commence a tender for the procurement of play area equipment,
2. Delegate authority to the Group Head of Neighbourhood Services and Chair of Environment and Sustainability Committee to appoint the chosen supplier/s; and
3. Authorise the Group Head of Corporate Governance to enter into a contract with the selected supplier.

The Committee **resolved** to approve the recommendations as outlined above.

44/24 Houses of Multiple Occupancy Report

Committee considered a report on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) within the Borough that sought agreement as to whether an Article 4 Direction should be served on HMOs which are permitted development throughout the Borough, part of the Borough or leave it to a future review.

This matter had been discussed in 2018 and 2020 and on both occasions it was agreed that further evidence would be needed before a decision could be made as to whether HMOs having a causing a negative impact within the Borough.

The Committee felt that the Officers' recommendation to continue to monitor the situation for another year was based on the figures within the report but members felt that they were not a true reflection of the number of issues

surrounding HMOs. Some members had been contacted by residents who were not willing to put in an official complaint for fear of retaliation and those cases were not included within the report statistics. The Chair put forward that the Committee should agree to Option 3 within the report and this was approved by the Committee. An additional recommendation was approved that would mean a report would be brought back to this Committee within a year to review any additional evidence.

Committee **resolved** that:

1. The Council introduces an Article 4 Direction across the wards of Ashford North & Stanwell South, Staines and Stanwell North (the wards with the highest number of complaints and applications) withdrawing the permitted development right to convert a dwelling house (C3) to a House in Multiple Occupation (C4) coming into effect after 1 year of its introduction; and
2. This decision would be reviewed at this committee within a year to consider any further evidence and to decide whether to extend the Article 4 Direction to other wards.

45/24 Update to Community Assets Policy

The Committee were advised that this report was only intended to update the current policy and that a complete review would be undertaken later in the year.

Concerns were raised about the potential development on Green Belt sites and requested that a list be provided of those parks within the Borough that were not in the Green Belt.

Councillor Boughtflower requested a name vote.

For	Councillors Bateson, Beatty, Beecher, Buck, J Doran, Grant, Gibson, Nichols, Rutherford Sexton & Williams - 11
Against	Councillors Attewell, Boughtflower, Howkins & Lee - 4
Abstain	0

Committee **resolved** to:

1. Agree the Council Administration's proposal to allow the consideration of new community development in the Council's recreation grounds and green open spaces; and
2. Approve changes to wording within the Community Lettings Policy dated November 2022. Within Section 5 to replace the wording "New development on recreation grounds or other green open spaces will not be considered" with the following:

“New community development on recreation grounds or other green open spaces will only be considered when it is appropriate to do so and there is no net adverse impact to the Biodiversity of the location. If it can be demonstrated by the person/organisation making the application, in consultation with the Councillors, that there is benefit to the wider community, the matter will be considered in more detail. All applications being progressed will be subject to a viability assessment and due diligence, as set out in Appendix 6 and taken to the Council’s Corporate Policy and Resources Committee.

46/24 Audited Financial Statements for Knowle Green Estates (KGE) for the year end 31 March 2023

Committee were advised that The Board of Directors of Knowle Green Estates Ltd approved the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023 on 18 October 2023 following a meeting with the External Auditors.

The Auditors provided an unqualified audit report and the accounts had been filed at Companies House and with His Majesty’s Revenue & Customs (HMRC) where there is no Corporation Tax to pay.

The Committee **resolved** to note the audited financial statements for Knowle Green Estates (KGE) for the year end 31 March 2023.

47/24 Spelthorne Direct Services Accounts for Year End 31 March 2023

This item was presented by the Chief Accountant in the absence of the Chief Finance Officer. The Chief Accountant declared an interest as he was on the Board of Directors of Spelthorne Direct Services Ltd.

The Committee were advised that the Board of Directors of Spelthorne Direct Services Ltd approved the account for the year ended 31 March 2023 on 14 December 2023.

The Auditors provided an unqualified audit report and the accounts had been filed at Companies House and with His Majesty’s Revenue & Customs (HMRC), where there is no Corporation Tax to pay.

The Committee **resolved** to note the report.

48/24 Increase in Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit for External Debt

Committee considered an addendum report to the 2024-25 Treasury Management Strategy, Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit for External Debt.

The Committee **resolved** to:

1. Note that on 01 April the approved Operational Boundary for external debt was breached,
2. Recommend to Council that the approved Operational Boundary for external debt be increased from £1,067m to £1,170m; and
3. Recommend to Council that the approved Authorised Limit for external debt be increased from £1,167m to £1,270m.

**It was proposed by Councillor Bateson
Seconded by Councillor Beecher**

and **resolved** by the Committee to suspend Standing Order 38.3 to allow the meeting to continue to 10.30pm.

49/24 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Progress Review

Committee considered a progress report from the Local Government Association (LGA) following the Corporate Peer Challenge undertaken them on 15-17 November 2022 and the detailed report that was received February 2023.

The report outlined the progress that had been made in addressing the 12 recommendations from the LGA

The Committee **resolved** to note the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Report.

50/24 Corporate Risk Management

The Committee considered a report on the Corporate Risk Register.

Following changes to the internal audit arrangements the Committee asked which officer would now be responsible for the Corporate Risk Register.

The Group Head of Corporate Governance advised that this decision had not yet been taken but arrangements would be finalised by the end of May 2024 and reported back to the committee.

The Committee **resolved** to note the report.

51/24 Forward Plan

The Committee **resolved** to note the contents of the Forward Plan for this Committee but asked that the following item be added:

Knowle Green Estates Strategy.

52/24 Exclusion of Public & Press (Exempt Business)

It was proposed by Councillor Bateson, seconded by Councillor Gibson and resolved that the public and press be excluded during consideration of the following item, in accordance with paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) because it was likely to disclose information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information because, disclosure to the public would prejudice the financial position of the authority in being able to undertake even-handed negotiations and finalising acceptable contract terms.

53/24 Extension of Funding under Round 1 and 2 of the Local Authority Housing Fund

The Committee considered a report on an Extension of Funding under Round 1 and 2 of the Local Authority Housing Fund.

Committee **resolved** to approve the recommendations as outlined in the report.

54/24 Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3

This item was considered at the meeting held on 23 April 2024.

Committee considered a report on the Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3.

The Committee **resolved** to approve the recommendations as outlined in the report.

55/24 Urgent Actions

The Committee **resolved** to note the update on the urgent action.

56/24 Corporate Policy and Resources Chair's Updates

There were none.

The meeting ended at 18:41.