Elmbridge Borough Council

Cabinet

Report of a meeting held on 10 October 2018

Members of the Cabinet:

* T.G. Oliver (Leader)
* J.W. Browne (Deputy Leader)

A.P. Burley
* A. Kelly
* G.P. Dearlove
* Mrs. R. Mitchell
* M.F. Howard

Also present:

32/18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

33/18 Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19 September 2018

The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 19 September 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

Recommendation to Council on 5 December 2018

34/18 The Care & Repair Elmbridge Handyperson Service - a review of fees and charges

(Link to Council Priorities: P2 and P4)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing introduced the report that provided background to the Council’s Handyperson Scheme and proposed changes to the charges with effect from 1 April 2019.

The Cabinet was reminded that the Care and Repair Elmbridge (CARE) was the Council’s in-house Home Improvement Agency which provided a range of services to help older and vulnerable residents to live independently and safely by repairing, improving or adapting their homes.

CARE ran a well-established handyperson service (HPS) which carried out small jobs and minor repairs in and around residents’ homes. The work was limited to a maximum of two hours duration and the service was available to homeowners and private tenants who were either aged 70 or more, disabled, vulnerable in some other way and / or were in receipt of means-tested benefits.
With regard to the charging arrangements, the Portfolio Holder advised that the HPS charged a standard rate of £17 per hour for labour, with those in receipt of particular means-tested benefits being charged £10 per hour. Materials were charged at cost and keysafes were supplied and fitted for £50.

As the labour charges for the HPS had not been reviewed or increased for at least nine years, the charges were towards the lower end of those part-publicly funded services operating across Surrey.

In this regard, the Portfolio Holder reported that a review of charges had been undertaken in order to maintain the financial viability of the service and help limit pressure on the Council’s cost base. Analysis of work undertaken by the HPS between 1 April and 31 August 2018 indicated that approximately 60% of the chargeable hours were charged at the standard rate of £17 per hour, with 40% at the lower rate. In light of these figures, it was proposed that, from 1 April 2019, the standard hourly labour rate be increased from £17 to £22 per hour and the discounted rate be increased from £10 to £11 per hour. It was also proposed that the charge for supplying and fitting keysafes be increased from £50 to £55. It was considered that these changes would limit the level of increase for those on qualifying benefits to £1 per hour; help alleviate pressure on the Council’s cost base by bringing in additional fees in the region of £2,000 to £3,000 per year; and longer-term it would help put the service on a more sustainable footing, by having caught up with inflation.

It was further proposed that with effect from 2020/21, the charges for the HPS be increased by inflation (using the retail price index in place as at the preceding September), rounded to the nearest ten pence, save in the circumstances where Members approve an increase over the relevant rate of inflation.

The Portfolio Holder also took the opportunity to provide a brief update with regard to a review into the delivery of aids and adaptations across Surrey. The Cabinet noted that officers across the Surrey Boroughs and Districts, Surrey County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Groups were working together to determine how the handyperson services could do more in respect of the preventative agenda. This work was ongoing but it was anticipated that by mid-2019, it would have advanced sufficiently to establish how the HPS might change to best deliver what was needed.

The Cabinet discussed the proposed charges and the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Transport queried how the member of staff travelled to the residents’ homes. The Strategic Director and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the staff member used their own vehicle and mileage was reimbursed accordingly. She further commented that the use of the Council’s electric vehicles / a company vehicle was currently being explored.

The Leader reported that he used to be involved with Homesupport Elmbridge, a charity which provides practical help and support to people in the Borough and surrounding areas, who due to age, sickness or disability required additional support at home. Whilst the Council’s Handyperson Service was
excellent, the Leader commented that the users of the service were probably the same that used the services of Homesupport Elmbridge. In this regard, he considered that there could be an opportunity for both organisations to work together and he asked that the Interim Head of Housing Services meet with representatives of Homesupport Elmbridge to see if there were any synergies / benefits for a closer working relationship.

The Leader invited Councillor Mrs. C. Elmer, a Walton South Ward Councillor, to address the meeting. Councillor Mrs. Elmer advised Members that her mother had been a recipient of both services (Handyperson Scheme and Homesupport Elmbridge) and in her opinion, with both organisations working closely together in the future this would not only provide a greater networking opportunity but could result in the Handyperson Scheme benefitting from more clients.

The Leader then invited Councillor Mrs. M. Marshall, Deputy Group Leader of the Liberal Democrats Political Group, to address the meeting. Councillor Mrs. Marshall advised that she had attended the recent Annual General Meeting of Homesupport Elmbridge, and there had been a discussion about working with the Council’s Handyperson Scheme.

**Recommended:** that

(a) the standard hourly charge for the Handyperson Service be increased from £17 per hour to £22 per hour; the concessionary rate (applying to residents on means-tested benefits) be increased from £10 per hour to £11 per hour; and the charge for supplying and fitting keysafes be increased from £50 to £55, with effect from 1 April 2019;

(b) hourly rates be uplifted annually thereafter in line with the retail price inflation index (RPIX) (with rounding to the nearest 10p), with Member approval only sought where increases beyond RPIX are proposed; and

(c) the work being undertaken to review the Handyperson Service with a view to enhancing the service and providing greater value for money for the Council and service users alike be noted.

**Matters of Report**

35/18  **Progress report on Syrian refugee resettlement programme in Elmbridge**

(Link to Council Priorities: P2 and P4)

The Portfolio Holder for Housing introduced the report and reminded Members that in September 2016, the Cabinet had resolved to participate in the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) to assist a minimum of 5 and up to a maximum of 15 Syrian households over a five-year period.
The Cabinet was advised that the first family had arrived in August 2017 and the most recent in September 2018. Four of the five families included dependent children and they had been housed in private-rented accommodation in different locations around the Borough. All the families had been receiving support from the Family Support Caseworker and had been assessed as progressing well in key areas, with the children well settled into local schools and the adults progressing in terms of learning English. The adults had been working on developing their skills, knowledge and experience to get them “work-ready” with some undertaking voluntary work and / or attending work interviews and job trials. The children had also settled well and several were in the scouts and / or attending after school clubs.

The Portfolio Holder reported that securing suitable accommodation remained a challenge with attention being focussed on private landlords willing or able to let properties at or close to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate, given that the families were in receipt of housing benefit. Landlords had been recruited through various means, ranging from the Council’s own communication channels, property appeals and also through the efforts of Elmbridge CAN and the wider community.

With regard to the funding of the Scheme, it was noted that the costs incurred by the Council during the first year of resettlement had been reimbursed by Central Government. Furthermore, the Government had committed further funds to assist with the costs over years two to five. The Portfolio Holder was pleased to report that, to date, the Scheme had operated on a cost neutral basis for the Council.

The Portfolio Holder further advised that with the arrival of the fifth family in September 2018, the Council had met its initial target of resettling at least five households and was now in a position to take stock and decide on whether to continue accepting further cases through the VPRS, up to the maximum of fifteen, as originally agreed in September 2016. In this regard, it was proposed that the Council remained open to accepting further cases, given the scale of the need and that there was still some way to go before the Government’s target of resettling 20,000 individuals through the VPRS was met.

Members noted that there were some uncertainties and challenges which could mean that it might not be possible to hit the higher target. The availability of further accommodation could not be assumed and clarity was awaited from Central Government with regard to the future of the VPRS in 2020, given that it was a five-year programme.

In addition, the provision and funding of support and the need to balance caseloads with capacity were important considerations too. Whilst resettling more households would bring in more Home Office funding, there was a balance to be struck in terms of the capacity and resilience of the Family Support Service to manage additional cases. To date, it had been possible to rely on one caseworker (who was Arabic speaking) but if the Council was to take significantly more cases, then consideration would need to be given as to how that would be managed.
In this regard, the Portfolio Holder advised that it was proposed that the Council continue to offer to resettle households under the VPRS, but on the understanding that setting more specific and time-related targets was not appropriate, given the various challenges and uncertainties going forward.

The Cabinet welcomed the positive report and noted that when compared with the other Surrey Boroughs and Districts that were participating in the Scheme, Elmbridge was mid-range. It was also acknowledged that finding families and suitable accommodation continued to be a challenge.

Resolved that

(a) the contents of the report and specifically that as at October 2018, five families had now been resettled in Elmbridge through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme be noted; and

(b) the original target be maintained and that efforts continue to resettle further households through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, up to a maximum of 15.

36/18 Recommendations from the Countryside Consultative Group meeting held on 12 July 2018

(Link to Council Priorities: A5, A6, P4, P5)

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture informed the Cabinet that, at its meeting on 27 September 2018, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered five recommendations from the Countryside Consultative Group (CCG) meeting held on 12 July 2018.

Firstly, in respect of the Claygate Common Access, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had supported the CCG’s recommendation that the track accessway could be moved subject to the resident bearing all the costs.

With regard to a request to give permission to construct a new accessway across Littleworth Common to Couchmore House which would allow the construction of two additional dwellings in the grounds of Couchmore House, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had supported the CCG’s recommendation that this was not appropriate for this area and as such an additional crossover could not be supported.

In respect of the Lower Mole Countryside Project and the financial support that the Council provided by way of an annual grant, whilst supporting the CCG’s recommendation, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered that in order to provide clarification to the project, the Council would continue to provide funding over a 3-year period through to 2020/21. Furthermore, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that consideration be given to the current grant being increased annually by inflation.
With regard to a request from one of the residents of Korea Cottages, Tilt Road who was seeking permission to have an ‘H-Bar’ painted on Tilt Road outside their property, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had supported the CCG’s recommendation that this request could not be supported.

Finally, a request had been received from Glaxosmithkline (GSK) for permission to resurface the existing vehicular track and create a new pedestrian access path adjacent to the existing vehicle accessway. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had supported the recommendation from the CCG that, as insufficient information had been provided, the request should be deferred, and further information in respect of neighbour consultation and information on accidents / near misses for tracks / roads should be provided by GSK.

On consideration of the report from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Cabinet concurred with the recommendations in respect of the Claygate Common Access; the access request at Couchmore House, Littleworth Common; and the Tilt Road parking.

With regard to the Lower Mole Countryside Project, given that it was not usual practice for the Council to support annual funding on a 3-year basis, the Cabinet considered that the original recommendation from the CCG should be supported.

In respect of the request from Glaxosmithkline, the Leader invited Councillor Mrs. J.R. Turner, Group Leader of the Hinchley Wood Residents’ Association Political Group, to address the meeting. Councillor Mrs. Turner provided historical context to this request and given that the requested access would be over common land, a number of residents from the area had raised concerns over the detriment to the common should permission be granted. She further commented that should permission be granted, whilst the costs of the work would be met by GSK, the Council would retain control and manage the work.

Resolved that

(a) with regard to the Claygate Common Access, the request to move the track accessway be supported subject to the resident bearing all the associated costs;

(b) with regard to the access request at Couchmore House, Littleworth Common, as this was not appropriate for this area, support for an additional crossover be not supported;

(c) in respect of the Lower Mole Countryside Project:

(i) the Council provide an indication that funding for the project will continue over the next 3-year period;

(ii) consideration be given that the current grant be increased annually by inflation;
These Minutes should be referred to in conjunction with the Minutes of the subsequent meeting of the Council, where they are presented; and for completeness to the next relevant meeting when the Minutes are adopted.

(d) with regard to the Tilt Road parking, the request to paint an ‘H-Bar’ on Tilt Road outside Korea Cottages, be not supported;

(e) the request by Glaxosmithkline for permission to resurface the existing vehicular track and create a new pedestrian access path adjacent to the existing vehicle accessway be deferred for the following further information:

(i) results and findings from neighbour consultation; and

(ii) more information on accidents / near misses for track / road.

37/18 Strategic Spending Board Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Allocations - September 2018

(Link to Council Priorities: P2)

The Portfolio Holder for Planning Services introduced the report that set out the recommendations of the Strategic Spending Board.

The Cabinet noted that on 12 September 2018, the Strategic Spending Board had held an additional meeting to consider one application that had been deferred at the Board meeting in June 2018 and one application that had been deferred back to the Board by Cabinet in July 2018. The opportunity had also been taken to present a new bid for strategic funding from Surrey County Council – Highways.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the application from Surrey County Council for improved pedestrian facilities in the vicinity of Long Ditton St. Mary’s Junior School had been supported and recommended for full funding of £52,000.

With regard to the application from the North West Surrey Clinical Commissioning Group (NWSCCG), which had sought £140,000 for the provision of GP services at Walton Community Hospital, the Portfolio Holder reported that as the applicant had only recently commenced the consultation with local residents and Ward Councillors and given that the necessary change of use had yet to be obtained from the Council’s Planning Services Team, the Board had felt that it could not determine the application at that time. Accordingly, a deferral of the application had been supported for consideration at the next meeting of the Board which was likely to take place in early 2019.

In respect of the application from the Cobham Free School and Cobham Rugby & Sports Association, which had sought £323,418 for the balance of the project cost towards an artificial playing pitch at Cobham Rugby for the benefit of the state-funded school, the Portfolio Holder reported that the majority of the Board had considered that they could not support the application and therefore no funding was recommended in this regard. Whilst considering that, in his personal view, this had been the wrong decision, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged that the application had been dealt with through a democratic process and unfortunately, he had been outvoted at the meeting.
Accordingly, the Cabinet

Resolved that the recommendations made by the Strategic Spending Board, as set out at Appendix A of the report, be agreed.

38/18 Local Development Scheme 2018 to 2021

(Link to Council Priorities: P1)

The Portfolio Holder for Planning Services introduced the report that sought approval for a new Local Development Scheme (LDS) 2018-2021.

The Cabinet was reminded that the Council was required to prepare, publish and keep up to date, a timetable for the production of Local Plan documents.

The Portfolio Holder reported that in July 2018, the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) had been published. This revised document had provided much needed certainty, and, coupled with measures put in place to resolve further slippages in the delivery of the Local Plan evidence base, the Council was now in a position to prepare and publish a new LDS with a revised timetable for taking forward the Local Plan over the next three years (2018-2021).

The Cabinet acknowledged that since the publication of the previous LDS in November 2017, progress on the new Local Plan had been continuing. In response to the Strategic Options consultation (Dec 2016-Feb 2017), Officers had been further developing the Council’s Local Plan evidence base as well as undertaking a number of additional evidence base studies, including a Borough-wide Density Study; Urban Capacity Study; and supplementary work on the initial Green Belt Boundary Belt Review 2016. Much of this work was now concluding and would inform the next key stage in the Local Plan preparation.

The Portfolio Holder reported that the revised timetable for the preparation of the Local Plan responded to the changes in national planning policy as well as enabling the completion of the outstanding key evidence base studies which were necessary to support an appropriate strategy for sustainable growth within the Borough. The draft LDS sought to respond to the Council’s calendar, allowing for sufficient lead-in times to support decision making as well as respecting periods of publicity restrictions during the Election periods.

The Cabinet acknowledged that it was important that the Council continued to demonstrate its commitment to plan preparation moving forward expediently to the next stages of consultation. Members were reminded that previously, the Government had made it clear that those authorities who were not planning positively through the preparation of up-to-date local plans were at risk of having key decisions on development in their Boroughs being made by the Planning Inspectorate and Secretary of State rather than by locally elected Councillors.
The Leader thanked the Portfolio Holder for Planning Services for his comprehensive update and commented that as the timetable was progressed, the public would be regularly updated. Should the timetable slip for any reason, updates would be provided accordingly. The Leader further commented that he hoped that there would be significant public engagement and that the public took the opportunity to contribute to the work involved with the preparation of the new Local Plan.

The Leader invited Councillor S.J. Selleck, Group Leader of the Residents’ Associations Political Group, to address the meeting. Councillor Selleck referred to the review of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule and suggested that perhaps there was the opportunity for the Council to review the level of charges, which he believed had been agreed some 4-5 years ago. Given that the cost of providing infrastructure was increasing, Councillor Selleck felt that a review of the level of charges to ensure that they were appropriate going forward was important. Whilst not wanting to stifle development, he reiterated that it was an opportune time to consider whether the Council could structure the charging differently, as long as it complied with the CIL Regulations.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning Services agreed that there was an opportunity to review the level of charges. However, he reported that the Government had indicated that it was looking at the CIL process and therefore it might be better to wait until some guidance / consultation document was received in this regard.

The Leader advised that as the Council was an early adopter of the CIL process, there was an opportunity, in the light of any further guidance, that the Council reviews its CIL processes which could include frequency of meetings and how the Strategic Spending Board operates with the Local Spending Boards etc.

Resolved that the draft Local Development Scheme 2018 to 2021 that set out the timetable for the preparation of a new Local Plan and associated documents, as attached at Appendix A of the report, be approved.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 7.29 pm
Democratic Services Officer

Mrs. T. Hulse

Principal Committee and Member Services Officer

Other Officers in attendance

R. Moran

Chief Executive

Mrs. S. Selvanathan

Strategic Director and Deputy Chief Executive

R. Lee

Strategic Director

Mrs. C. Herbert

Law Practice Manager

Mrs. E. Jones

Sports Development Officer