

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Executive Summary

The Council is invited to consider the recommendations from the meetings of the Executive held on 8 December 2022 and 19 January 2023. The extracts from the minutes of the Executive are set out in this report.

THE EXECUTIVE – 8 DECEMBER 2022

8A. EMPTY HOMES PLAN EXE22-049

Councillor Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced the report which sought approval of the Executive to recommend to Council the adoption of the Empty Homes Plan 2022 – 2027. It was explained that the Plan set out the Council's three strategic priorities to reduce the number of empty homes in the Borough. The Plan also detailed how the Council would work to prevent properties becoming 'long-term' empty and how it would bring back into use homes that had been previously left empty. Councillor Johnson highlighted that an Empty Homes Working Group had been established in 2021, attended by representatives from teams across the Council, to discuss the top ten cases of concern. It was noted that public consultation had been undertaken and the Housing Task Group had been consulted on the Plan.

Councillor Dorsett, Shadow Housing Portfolio Holder, raised a number of questions regarding the report, including availability of a Ward breakdown of the 729 long term empty homes identified in the report, the number of premium empty homes, the rate of empty home Council Tax premium, success metrics, and use of the Empty Homes Grant. Councillor Johnson responded to the points raised and highlighted that the figures in the report related to October 2021. Councillor Johnson undertook to ask Officers to compile a Ward breakdown of current long term empty homes for circulation to the Executive and Councillor Dorsett. It was noted that lists of empty homes in their own Wards had previously been circulated to Councillors. In regard to success metrics, it was noted that the Green Book set a target of 40 empty homes brought back into use through Council intervention per annum. The Executive heard that the Empty Homes Grant had been very rarely used and therefore, it was proposed that it be removed for 2023/24.

The Executive welcomed the initiatives set out in the report to reduce the number of empty homes within the Borough, such as the Let's Rent Scheme, and acknowledged the work undertaken previously by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the issue. The Leader encouraged everyone to contact the Council if they had any information on empty homes given the desperate need for housing in the Borough.

RECOMMENDED to Council

- That (i) **the Empty Homes Plan 2022 – 2027, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted; and**
- (ii) **the Strategic Director - Communities be delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Empty Homes Plan in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing.**

Reason: To provide a transparent framework for the Council to bring empty homes back in to use.

THE EXECUTIVE – 19 JANUARY 2023

8B. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR S DORSETT - RENAMING OF HENRY PLAZA EXE23-018

At its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor S Dorsett

“The passing of Her Majesty Queen is one of the most important events in our lifetime. Many Woking residents, including current and former Councillors, made the journey to Westminster to pay tribute by “Queuing for the Queen”. Our own events over that week, including the Proclamation of the new King, and the moment of National Reflection, were extremely well attended by Woking residents, and Jubilee Square was fill to capacity. Given the strength of feeling Woking residents clearly have for the Royal Family and especially to the memory of Her Majesty the Queen, we are proposing a permanent tribute to Her Majesty. With that in mind it is proposed we rename Henry Plaza, the newest part of the Victoria Place, to Queen Elizabeth II Plaza.

Given that the Plaza opened in March of this year, the same year of her Platinum Jubilee and her untimely passing, it feels right in this year we can commemorate her memory with this tribute. Few residents are aware of the reasoning behind the current name of Henry Plaza. But having it be named Queen Elizabeth II Plaza, along with Jubilee Square and the Victoria Place itself, feels thematically constant. This tribute will reflect the love and admiration for her felt by our Woking community.”

Councillor Dorsett attended the meeting and spoke in support of the Motion. Although supportive of the sentiment of the Motion, the Executive was of the opinion that it would be more appropriate to name somewhere new in honour of Queen Elizabeth II. It was noted that Henry Plaza had been named in honour of Henry Cawsey, a distinguished and influential local figure. The Executive was advised that the Leader had asked Officers to progress a plaque to be displayed in the Plaza on Henry Cawsey. It was suggested that surviving relatives of Henry Cawsey could be invited to its unveiling. Alternative locations which could be named in honour of Queen Elizabeth II were invited by Members for consideration by Officers.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be not supported.

8C. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR S DORSETT - MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETINGS EXE23-019

At its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor S Dorsett

“Openness and Transparency are vital to the workings of this Council. Therefore the minutes of Full Council should adequately reflect members supplementary questions to the Leader and the Executive.

Recommendations of the Executive

At present Councillor Questions to Full Council are recorded with the written answers given as a printed document. However supplementary questions and answers are not minuted.

This means the only way for our residents to understand the supplementary question and subsequent answer is to watch the meeting from the webcast.

We want to make it as easy as possible for our residents to engage with the work we as a council do therefore moving forwards this Council resolves to include in the minutes all Supplementary Questions from members, along with the answers given. This will allow our residents to better understand and follow how the Executive is held to account by members.”

Councillor Dorsett spoke in support of the Motion. The Executive was supportive of the Motion, noting that providing written answers to supplementary questions would further openness and transparency of Council meetings. In order to reduce the burden upon Democratic Services, it was agreed that minutes of the meeting should be drafted as a priority and answers to supplementary questions should be drafted separately. Following discussion, it was felt that the timescale for minuting supplementary questions should be by the next Ordinary Council meeting. Public Questions to the Executive were highlighted, and it was agreed that the Motion should be amended before Council on 9 February 2023 to also include the minuting of supplementary questions at Executive.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion, to be amended to include Public Questions to the Executive, be supported.

The Executive recommended that the motion should be expanded to include reference to the minutes of the Executive, ensuring that questions from Members of Public received at meetings of the Executive are minuted. Accordingly, it is proposed that the motion should be amended as follows (additional wording is highlighted):

“Openness and Transparency are vital to the workings of this Council. Therefore the minutes of Full Council should adequately reflect members supplementary questions to the Leader and the Executive.

At present Councillor Questions to Full Council are recorded with the written answers given as a printed document. However supplementary questions and answers are not minuted.

This means the only way for our residents to understand the supplementary question and subsequent answer is to watch the meeting from the webcast.

We want to make it as easy as possible for our residents to engage with the work we as a council do therefore moving forwards this Council resolves to include in the minutes all Supplementary Questions from members, along with the answers given. This will allow our residents to better understand and follow how the Executive is held to account by members. **Furthermore, the Council resolves to include in the minutes of the Executive all public questions, supplementary questions and the answers given at meetings of the Executive.”**

8D NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR W FORSTER - COMMUNITY DIAGNOSTIC CENTRE IN WOKING EXE23-020

At its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor W Forster

“This Council notes that our residents’ closest diagnostic centres are currently in Ashford, Chertsey and Guildford. At present Woking residents often have to travel outside the Borough for medical tests or a diagnosis.

This Council warmly welcomes and fully supports the decision to open a community diagnostic centre at Woking Community Hospital. The planned expansion of a diagnostic hub in Woking is in line with the NHS Long Term Plan will provide a local, accessible service for our residents. The Council recognises that access to the new services has the potential to improve our residents quality of life and may help to save lives.

This Council believes that the decision to open a strategic community diagnostic hub in Woking is a clear example of this authority’s close working relationship with our key partners, especially Ashford and St Peters NHS Trust, Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board and CSH.”

Councillor Forster spoke in support of the Motion. The Executive welcomed the Motion, noting the Council’s important partnership work with key partners to bring forward a planned expansion at Woking Community Hospital to provide a diagnostic hub for the benefit of residents of Woking. The Executive further welcomed that the decision to open a community diagnostic centre at Woking Community Hospital would provide diagnostic facilities to residents locally and would reduce the need for Woking residents to travel to Ashford. Councillor Forster informed the Executive that the proposed development would increase parking pressures at Woking Community Hospital. Therefore, Officers had been asked to consider how the Council could help NHS service delivery by offering parking permits at a public sector rate in its car parks.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be supported.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
Reporting Person:	Julie Fisher, Chief Executive Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3333
Contact Person:	Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
Shadow Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ayesha Azad Email: cllrayesha.azad@woking.gov.uk
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