

John Armstrong

From: James Whiteman
Sent: 21 November 2018 16:56
To: Caroline Reeves
Cc: Councillors; Robert Parkin; John Armstrong; Sarah White; Stuart Harrison; Directors; Carolyn Patterson
Subject: FW: Consideration of the Wisley Garden Village issue

Dear Caroline,

Please see my responses to the questions you submitted on 4 November 2018 to the Managing Director, the Chairman of the Corporate Governance and Standards Committee, the Leader of the Council and the Monitoring Officer in relation to the Wisley Garden Village issue. You have indicated that you are happy for me to respond via email and copy this response to all Councillors. The Chairman of the Corporate and Standards Committee has also agreed to let you make a statement regarding your questions at the meeting of the committee on 29 November 2018 to enable you to make further comment in relation to this response. A copy of this email will also be attached to the agenda for information.

Questions raised by Councillor Caroline Reeves:

1: When did the Executive and Council officers know the matter would go to the Executive for decision? Why wasn't it on the Forward Plan - which 'sets out details of the various decisions that the Executive and full Council are likely to take over the next 12 months in so far as they are known at the time of publication.'

The Director of Planning and Regeneration confirms that her attention was first drawn to the MHCLG Garden Communities Prospectus on 17 August 2018. She sent an email to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Paul Spooner on the same day asking whether he would support the submission of a bid from Guildford in respect of Wisley Airfield. Councillor Paul Spooner responded by email on 20 August 2018 giving his support.

During the period up to 11 September 2018, the Planning Policy team were busy preparing for the consultation on the proposed Main Modifications to the Submission Local Plan. In the period leading up to and during the consultation period, key members of the Planning Policy team, who had spent significant time in the preceding months preparing for the local plan examination, attending and responding to points raised during the inquiry, preparing the main modifications to the plan and the consultation arrangements, finally took the opportunity of taking two weeks' annual leave. This meant that work on the preparation of the bid and seeking authority for its submission was not given the priority which it would otherwise have received.

The Forward Plan setting out key decisions and other decisions to be taken by the Executive is published monthly. The Forward Plan setting out details of the decisions to be taken by the Executive on 30 October 2018 was published on 25 September 2018.

In the normal course of events, any decision to submit a bid for funding to external organisations would be taken by the relevant Lead Councillor in accordance with the General Delegation to all Lead Councillors set out in Part 3 of the Council's Constitution (Responsibilities of the Leader and Lead Councillors).

Instead of a lead councillor decision on whether to submit a bid, the Leader of the Council indicated on 19 October 2018 that he would like to have an open public debate on the matter

and so decided that the matter should be referred to the Executive for decision at its next scheduled meeting on 30 October 2018.

The Managing Director, and the Director of Planning and Regeneration, have both apologised publically, and in a meeting with relevant councillors, for the short time period in preparing the original report and also for not involving ward councillors at an earlier date.

2: All key decisions [those likely to result in expenditure or savings of £200,000 or have a significant impact on 2 or more wards] are required to be publicised in the Forward Plan at least 28 days before the relevant Executive decision. Again, why was this requirement not met? Is it not a key decision?

As explained at the Executive meeting, the Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and the Democratic Services Manager considered that a decision to submit a bid, of itself, could not be construed as being a "key decision", as defined in the Council's Constitution and referred to in the question. Consequently, there was no requirement to publish via the Forward Plan notice of intention to take the decision at least 28 days before the decision was scheduled to be taken.

This differs from a substantive decision, which might follow and involve a host of possible interventions – including local development vehicles, supplementary planning documents, joint ventures, and statutory development corporations to promote a Garden Village, any one of which is likely to be a key decision.

3: Section 32 of the Garden Communities Prospectus states : 'We expect the submission of a proposal to have been preceded by a period of engagement with the Department [MHCLG] and Homes England, and encourage initial contact to be made as early as possible.' When did the Council first contact the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about a Bid?

The Planning Policy Team first spoke with MHCLG specifically about the Wisley Garden Village bid on 5 November 2018.

Kind regards

James

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