

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 November 2020

- \* Councillor Paul Spooner (Chairman)
- \* Councillor James Walsh (Vice-Chairman)

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| * Councillor Dennis Booth   | * Councillor George Potter    |
| * Councillor Colin Cross    | * Councillor Jo Randall       |
| * Councillor Angela Goodwin | * Councillor Tony Rooth       |
| * Councillor Tom Hunt       | * Councillor Deborah Seabrook |
| * Councillor Ramsey Nagaty  | * Councillor Fiona White      |

\*Present

Councillors Tim Anderson (Lead Councillor for Resources), Joss Bigmore (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery), Ruth Brothwell, Angela Gunning, Julia McShane (Lead Councillor for Community), Caroline Reeves (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Management), and James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment) were also in attendance.

### **OS34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **OS35 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

### **OS36 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 20 October 2020 were agreed.

### **OS37 COVID-19 RESPONSE – UPDATE**

The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery introduced the item. He referred to the Remembrance Sunday event held in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines and streamed online. He advised the meeting that the pavement widening scheme on Bridge Street was being re-assessed due to the traffic congestion caused. The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery Committee outlined the role and work of the Borough's COVID Marshalls. He informed the meeting that Guildford's Christmas lights would be on from around 18 November, although the usual switch on event could not take place.

The Managing Director gave a presentation on the current COVID-19 situation and the Council's response. The Committee was advised that the COVID-19 infection rate for Surrey had increased to 123.1 per 100,000 and in Guildford the rate was 132.9 per 100,000. The Managing Director indicated that there were 1,575 COVID-19 cases and, as at 9 November, 97 deaths in Guildford. The meeting was informed that the number of COVID-19 related deaths in Guildford had not increased since 25 September.

The Managing Director summarised the new national restrictions in place from 5 November and advised the meeting of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, the increase in the Self

Employed Income Support Grant, the Local Restrictions Support Grant, and the Additional Restrictions Grant. He informed the Committee that the Council was working with health partners as part of the Guildford and Waverley mass vaccination group to identify suitable sites for future vaccinations.

The Managing Director confirmed the continuance of essential Council services and the closure and suspension of other services during the second national lockdown. He advised that there had been a substantial increase in demand for food parcels during the first week of the second lockdown. The Managing Director referred to the financial implications and challenges for the Council from the pandemic.

A member of the Committee thanked officers for arranging the Remembrance Sunday service.

In reply to a question about support for elderly and vulnerable residents, the Community Wellbeing Manager advised that while day care centres had been required to close for the second lockdown, doorstep home visits, daily welfare telephone calls, and visits in full PPE to the most vulnerable had continued.

RESOLVED: That COVID-19 response updates continue to be provided to Committee meetings.

### **OS38 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION**

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Community and reminded the Committee of Councillor McShane's main areas of responsibility: health; wellbeing; access and disability; safety; grants and voluntary services; careline; the handyperson service; and care & repair.

The following information and responses were provided during the ensuing discussion:

- The Lead Councillor for Community described the impact of COVID-19 on the services and teams within her portfolio, including a comparison with operations the previous year. She stated that the Council's welfare response to COVID-19 had been co-ordinated by Community Services. With reference to community safety, the Committee was advised that there had been a significant increase in applications for community triggers during the pandemic. The Lead Councillor for Community indicated that the careline service for 1,800 residents had continued throughout the pandemic, although periodic maintenance visits had been paused for a time and members of the team redeployed to conduct welfare visits. The meeting was informed that the grants and adaptations services had experienced a significant increase in demand caused by occupational therapy referrals. The Lead Councillor for Community indicated that the care and repair service was experiencing above average caseloads and almost 1,000 handyperson jobs had been completed in the six months since April 2020. In addition, she indicated that the number of community meals provided had doubled since the previous year.
- In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Community referred to the difficulties of confirming whether initiatives to address food poverty over half term had helped every family in need, including the stigma of food poverty. The Committee was informed of the Council's contributions to food insecurity initiatives during the October half-term, including working with the North Guildford Food Bank. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Community indicated that such support was likely to be repeated during the Christmas holiday notwithstanding the Government's announcement of school holiday provision.

- The Lead Councillor for Community confirmed that the Council's care and repair team treated referrals and adaptations for residents with motor neurone disease as urgent. The Director for Service Delivery indicated that the Council's maintenance staff were currently dealing mainly with urgent and emergency repairs but would also be supporting work for the vulnerable in the community to ensure adaptation work was carried out as quickly as possible.
- The Corporate Public Health Co-ordinator confirmed that the Council was involved in Guildford and Waverley mass vaccination group and had been asked to help identify sites to deliver the vaccination.
- A Committee member referred to a Community Foundation for Surrey webinar held that day and run in conjunction with Epsom and Ewell Food Bank and she advised that statistics on local food insecurity would soon be available on the Foundation's website.
- In response to a query about measures to audit and improve accessibility to churches and other places of worship in the Borough, the Lead Councillor for Community confirmed that currently Council resources were not available for such a piece of work. She suggested that quinquennial inspection reports by parochial church councils were a possible mechanism for identifying access issues.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Community and officers for answering questions.

### **OS39 ASPIRE – THE COUNCIL'S COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF PEOPLE WHO NEED OUR HELP**

The Lead Councillor for Community introduced the item. She advised the meeting that Aspire was supported by the Council's Community Wellbeing team working with partners, local communities, and individuals to help address issues of importance to their overall wellbeing and to support them to find solutions through activities and community projects. The Committee was informed that Aspire was for the whole Borough.

In reply to a question, the Lead Councillor for Community indicated that the ability of the voluntary sector to access funding would vary between organisations. She advised the meeting that the Council's revised voluntary grants scheme would be opening for applications in January 2021 and a new Aspire community grants scheme would commence in April 2021. In addition, she reminded the Committee of Guildford's ongoing community lottery and the Council's decision to launch a crowdfunding platform next year to aid projects run by local community groups.

In response to a question about future funding for Aspire, the Lead Councillor for Community indicated that Aspire helped deliver the Council's strategic priorities. The Community Wellbeing Manager referred to the role for Aspire in developing further community resilience in a post-COVID recovery.

In reply to a question about the decreasing number of projects funded by Aspire since its formation, the Lead Councillor for Community referred to the difficulties of launching new projects during COVID. The Community Wellbeing Manager explained that Aspire no longer funded posts within projects.

With reference to the possible use of Aspire grants for access and disability-access initiatives across the Borough, the Lead Councillor for Community indicated that the relatively small size of the grants available might be an issue for such projects.

The Community Wellbeing Manager indicated that it was not known how much the Council would receive from the £170 million COVID winter grant scheme to support vulnerable families in England during the school holidays.

The Lead Councillor for Community spoke of the importance of supporting voluntary and community networks and relationships into the post-COVID recovery period.

In reply to a question, the Community Wellbeing Manager agreed the importance of Aspire working within a community strategy and ensuring the sustainability of supported projects. In addition, she confirmed that the assessments of funding bids and subsequent monitoring was undertaken and recorded by the Community Welfare team.

RESOLVED: That the actions to deliver the strategic priorities of Aspire, as set out in the work plan submitted to the Committee, be supported.

#### **OS40 REVIEW OF NEW HOMES BONUS**

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Resources and the Director of Resources.

The Director of Resources introduced the report. She outlined the background to the introduction of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) and advised the Committee that the Council had received £12.7 million in NHB grant since 2011-12. The Director of Resources indicated that the Council had spent £6.4 million of NHB grant on Council services and £4.2 million of NHB funding on projects consistent with the Council's NHB policy. The meeting was informed that the remaining balance of the Council's NHB reserve at the end of the current financial year was likely to partially fund the Council's overspend on COVID-19. The Director of Resources indicated that the NHB was very unlikely to continue into 2021-22.

In response to comments from a Committee member, the Lead Councillor for Resources suggested the Housing Revenue Account was a suitable funding source for affordable and social housing in the Borough. The Director of Resources indicated that guidance on the use of the NHB indicated that the grant was a payment to compensate for the impact of housing on communities rather than an explicit funding source for new housing.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Resources and the Director of Resources for attending and answering questions.

RESOLVED: That the report submitted to the Committee detailing how the New Homes Bonus has been spent be noted.

#### **OS41 MATTERS OUTSTANDING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

The Chairman referred to three matters outstanding from previous meetings and observed that the update was little changed from the previous meeting of the Committee.

The Committee agreed that following the covering explanation note sent to Committee members on 20 October, the 'Update on the Implementation of Future Guildford' item be removed from the matters outstanding.

#### **OS42 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman introduced the item and confirmed the Lead Councillors assigned to question session slots at Committee meetings in 2021; namely, Councillor Anderson for January, Councillor Rigg for March, and Councillor Redpath for April.

The Chairman indicated that at the Committee's pre-meeting the week previous members had discussed the option of dissolving the Governance of Major Projects task and finish group in light of the emerging project and programme governance changes at the Council. He suggested that the issues to be addressed by the task group should not be dropped by the Committee and proposed to review the Council's project and programme governance through a formal Committee meeting agenda item. In addition, he indicated that such an agenda item could address any project decision-making or governance issues from the Walnut Bridge item (referred to as a matter outstanding in the previous item). The Committee agreed the change in approach.

The Committee agreed that the Chairman, in consultation with the Vice-Chairman, be authorised to progress the establishment of an in-depth task and finish group to examine mental health provision in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny work programme be amended as detailed above.

The meeting finished at 8.43 pm

Signed .....

Chairman

Date .....