

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 March 2021

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

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

\*Present

Councillors Joss Bigmore (Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery), David Bilbé, Chris Blow, Julia McShane (Lead Councillor for Community), John Redpath (Lead Councillor for Economy), Maddy Redpath, Caroline Reeves (Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing & Development Control), John Rigg (Lead Councillor for Regeneration), and James Steel (Lead Councillor for Environment) were also in attendance.

### **OS58 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The Committee was advised of apologies for absence from Councillors Tom Hunt and Fiona White.

### **OS59 LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT AND DECLARATION OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

The Chairman declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 6, Guildford Crematorium Redevelopment Post Project Review, due to his past association with the project while Leader of the Council. He indicated that this past association would not affect his judgment and participation or chairing.

### **OS60 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 2 February 2021 were agreed.

### **OS61 RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery introduced the item. He spoke of the optimism around falling infection rates and plans to re-open facilities and resume holding events. The Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Service Delivery advised the Committee of a drive through COVID testing facility at Onslow Park and Ride for keyworkers. He praised the progress of the vaccination programme regionally and in local Primary Care Networks, and thanked residents who had volunteered to help the process. He noted that the Borough's boundaries did not align with those of the health service and acknowledged that this meant there was a need to co-ordinate and improve communications for residents across the whole Borough.

The Managing Director gave a presentation on the current COVID-19 situation and the Council's response, beginning with an update on local cases. The Committee was advised

that the COVID-19 infection rate in Surrey was 46.8 per 100,000, lower than the national rate of 88.6 per 100,000, while Guildford's rate had decreased to 32.9 per 100,000. The Managing Director advised that in the previous week there had been 560 new cases in Surrey, of which 49 were in Guildford. The meeting was informed that as at 1 March there were 2,605 registered COVID-related deaths in Surrey, with 211 in Guildford.

The Managing Director advised the meeting of key COVID-19 issues: the Government road map to a phased easing of COVID restrictions; support and services for the most vulnerable, such as food parcels and community meal deliveries; business support, including the Local Restrictions Support Grant (for closed businesses); Council services; staff sickness; vaccination and testing, and communications strategy. The Committee heard that as part of the Council's duty to warn and inform during crises, 33,000 emails and 30,000 printed postcards were sent to residents advising of key information. The Managing Director informed the meeting that although the emails and postcards sent out included a link to information on the Surrey Heartlands Clinical Commissioning Group website he was aware that parts of the Borough were covered by other Clinical Commissioning Groups. He indicated that as the vaccination programme progressed information from all relevant CCGs would be included in the Council's communications.

In response to a question, the Community Wellbeing Manager outlined measures by Council staff to communicate and engage with clinically vulnerable people to increase the vaccination uptake.

In reply to a suggestion from a member of the Committee, the Managing Director indicated the value in discussing the post-pandemic recovery at a subsequent Committee meeting.

The Committee agreed to continue the COVID-19 response updates at its meetings.

## **OS62 LEAD COUNCILLOR QUESTION SESSION**

The Chairman welcomed the Lead Councillor for Regeneration and reminded the meeting of Councillor Rigg's main areas of responsibility: the town centre master plan; infrastructure; major projects; and strategic asset management. The Chairman indicated that due to the number of questions likely and the length of the evening's agenda it might be necessary to invite Councillor Rigg for a further question session in the summer. The Chairman advised the meeting that Councillor Rigg had requested to make an opening statement.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration stated that he had two portfolios: major projects and regeneration. He confirmed that many questions from the Committee had been shared with him in advance of the meeting.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration outlined the role and responsibilities of the Major Projects Portfolio Board. The meeting heard that the extensive requirements of the Board were not being met and as a consequence the Lead Councillor for Regeneration had formed six sub-programme boards to cover the detail of active projects; namely, Weyside, North Street, Ash Projects, the Town Centre Master Plan, Housing Development, and Other Projects.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration stated that the Council's Major Projects included Weyside Urban Village, Slyfield internal estate road, Guildford Council new Depot, the Town Centre Master Plan, the Sustainable Movement Corridor, the flood alleviation study, the Guildford West railway station and (soon also) Guildford East railway station, the Public Realm improvement, The Guildford Museum, the Walnut Bridge replacement, the town centre approaches, the A31/A331 and A323/A324 Hotspots project, the Ash Road Bridge project, Guildford Park housing scheme, Bright Hill, Blackwell farm, Guildford community

bike share, Guildford Crematorium, and Millbrook Weir. The meeting heard that the Lead Councillor for Regeneration no longer had responsibility for the Spectrum project.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration referred to his past difficulties obtaining key information on major projects. He suggested that the results of major projects undertaken by the Council had been mixed and identified a lack of relevant project experience within the Council together with a failure to obtain appropriate input from external experts. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration stated that he had to take advice from the Local Government Association and seek assistance from the Council's solicitor to try and get access to project meetings taking place with external advisors. He informed the Committee that he had been unhappy with both the management and reporting of projects at the Council.

With reference to the North Street project, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration informed the Committee of a past lack of information available to him. He indicated that progress had been made on the North Street project in 2020 and that the Council would be updated shortly.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that the Ash Road Bridge was an infrastructure project and suggested that as such it was the responsibility of Surrey County Council and should not have been embarked upon by the Council. The Committee heard about the Lead Councillor for Regeneration's concerns with the project and he advised that that information on the Ash Road Bridge, including costs and funding, would be available to Councillors at the March 2021 meeting of the Executive. In addition, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated he had concerns with other projects, including the Walnut Bridge, the Guildford Crematorium, and the Guildford Museum.

With reference to a review of the Council's major projects, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised the meeting that a number of repeated shortcomings had been identified, including a lack of clear project mandates, absence of a robust business case, a want of appropriate expertise, no audit trail for decision-making, no strategic consensus, and no standardised methodology. In addition, he suggested this approach had led to an acceptance within the Council to approve increasing project costs.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration suggested that many major infrastructure projects taken on by the Council should have been undertaken by Surrey County Council. While referring to the A31 Hotspots project, the Sustainable Movement Corridor, and Ash Road Bridge as examples of such projects, he indicated he supported their aims.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration referred to the Council's new project governance and noted the importance of appointing qualified and experienced project managers. He advised the meeting of the failure to deliver the Guildford Park Road housing project.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration outlined the challenges for Guildford and its town centre and referred to the town centre master plan project. He indicated that in a few weeks' time there would be presentations on progress made to the Executive, full Council, and officers, and then briefings to community and resident groups. The meeting was advised of the importance of strategic asset management and the Council's existing landholdings to deliver projects.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Regeneration for his statement and started with questions from Committee members.

In reply to a question about the working relationship with Surrey County Council (SCC), particularly, Surrey Highways, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that the

relationship was developing. He informed the meeting that he was reluctant for the Council to take on further road projects.

The Lead Councillor for Regeneration advised the Committee of progress relating to the proposed Guildford East and Guildford West railway stations.

In response to questions, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that pulling together housing delivery would be a task for the Council's new Director of Housing.

The meeting heard that there would be a series of three consultations on the North Street redevelopment prior to final submission by the developer. The Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that a similar consultation process would be followed for the St Mary's Wharf site.

In response to a question on the progress of the Sustainable Movement Corridor project, the Lead Councillor for Regeneration indicated that the University of Surrey had not confirmed its agreement to the current phase of the project. He advised the meeting that funding for the current phase was in place and indicated that a ransom strip relating to the University's development of Blackwell Farm was a separate issue.

The Chairman thanked the Lead Councillor for Regeneration for his attendance and statement.

### **OS63 GUILDFORD CREMATORIUM REDEVELOPMENT POST PROJECT REVIEW**

The Lead Councillor for Environment introduced the report submitted to the Committee. He advised the meeting that the Guildford Crematorium redevelopment project had addressed shortcomings with the previous crematorium building and had been underpinned by a sound business case which had been delivered. He suggested the report provided a balanced account of successes and learning points from the project.

The Parks and Landscape Manager confirmed that the quantity surveyor on the project, the architect, the main contractor, and the cremator supplier were at the meeting to support the Committee's review. He summarised the background and results of the project and gave a presentation on the redevelopment of the site and facilities. The Committee was advised of issues that arose, including an error in calculating the stack discharge height.

The Parks and Landscape Manager informed the meeting that the stack discharge height error was identified by a member of the public and had now been remedied. The Parks and Landscape Manager indicated that an internal investigation into the error had been completed and that an external audit of the issue was being undertaken. The meeting was informed that the investigation of the stack height error would be considered by the Committee at a later date. In addition, the Parks and Landscape Manager summarised the learning from the post project review.

Next, the meeting heard from Mr Peter Coleman from Guildford Society. Mr Coleman referred to the Guildford Crematorium winning the Society's design awards in two categories and praised the qualities of the design and architecture and the achievements of the project.

In response to a question, the Planning Development Manager confirmed that an air quality impact assessment was not a requirement at the time of the planning application in 2017 and was not requested as the new crematorium would be replacing an existing one on the same land.

With reference to the value of an air quality impact assessment, a member of the Committee suggested the Council should not necessarily be content with legal minimum standards. In his reply, the Parks and Landscape Manager referred to the cost implications of such an assessment.

A member of the Committee suggested that the scope of all Council projects should be specified clearly to avoid adding changes and costs later. The meeting heard that a well-defined scope would enable a more accurate projection of project costs and assessment of project viability.

In reply to a question, the Parks and Landscape Manager indicated that a final breakdown of the cost overruns for the project was not yet available. The Lead Specialist (Finance) summarised the discounted cash flow analysis within section 3.5.5 of the report submitted to the Committee and indicated she could provide further details if requested. A member of the Committee suggested the value of clearer financial explanations within reports.

The Parks and Landscape Manager advised the Committee of the merit in a project manager and project support dedicated to project delivery, rather than combining responsibility for a major project with another full-time role.

A member of the Committee suggested the Stack Discharge Height Error Internal Investigation (attached as a not for publication appendix to the report submitted to the Committee) could have been published with redactions.

RESOLVED: That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of information contained within the Appendix to the report on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act; namely, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

With the public excluded, the meeting discussed the emissions stack error, the timescale in which members of the public advised of the stack error and the Council's response, the performance of contractors, the possible publication of the external audit of the internal investigation of the emissions stack error, and the inclusion of NO<sub>x</sub> abatement plant as a variation in the contract.

Following the Committee's consideration of the exempt information the public was readmitted to the meeting.

The Managing Director thanked the Parks and Landscape Manager for project managing the redevelopment of Guildford Crematorium.

RESOLVED: (I) That the account of the project as presented in the report submitted to the Committee be noted.

(II) That the Executive be requested to ensure

- (i) Council projects are accurately scoped and well-defined at the outset and any extension of scope is assessed carefully.
- (ii) Council projects go beyond legal minimum standards and aspire to be the best possible.

- (iii) Senior officers be held accountable for ensuring that resources in place for projects are adequate.

**OS64 UPDATE ON GYPSY AND TRAVELLER UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS AND POSSIBLE TRANSIT SITE IN SURREY**

The Community Wellbeing Manager introduced the item and advised that there were two strands to the report submitted to the Committee: the Council's procedure for unauthorised encampments on Council land and the Surrey Leaders Group's proposal for a transit site to help alleviate the pressures surrounding unauthorised encampments on local communities.

In response to questions, the Community Wellbeing Manager advised that the Surrey Leaders Group had acknowledged the need for further transit sites across the county. She indicated that the transit site was the first step in a process. The Community Wellbeing Manager indicated that she was not aware of the design and facilities planned for the transit site.

The Community Wellbeing Manager advised the Committee that the Council's communications with travellers visiting the Borough regularly was excellent. She advised that both support and a protocol to establish communications were in place for travellers that might be new to the Borough.

In reply to a question from a Committee member, the meeting heard that the Council had a duty to assess the welfare needs of travellers at unauthorised encampments. The Community Wellbeing Manager indicated that based on experience of enforcement against unauthorised encampments the welfare needs of travellers were seldom judged to take priority over the issue of any trespass being committed.

In response to questions about the provision of COVID vaccinations for travellers, the Community Wellbeing Manager advised the Committee that across the country travellers had been targeted by NHS outreach services. She informed the Committee that travellers in priority vaccination groups had been offered support to access vaccine bookings online.

In response to calls for a plan from Surrey Leaders Group for further transit sites in the county, the Deputy Leader of the Council and Lead Councillor for Housing and Development Control advised the meeting that Surrey Leaders Group recognised further transit site provision was necessary. The Chairman noted the value in receiving an update on the matter from the Leader of the Council.

**OS65 OPERATION OF THE LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT, 2019-20**

The Lead Councillor for Environment introduced the item. He advised the meeting that the report submitted to the Committee provided a summary overview of Freedom Leisure's performance in operating the Council's leisure facilities for the ninth contract year (from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020). He stated that the preparation of the annual report by Freedom Leisure was delayed due to the furloughing of staff during the pandemic. In addition, the meeting heard that Freedom Leisure had been unable to provide all the information that would normally be included within the annual report, including a separate catering profit and loss account.

The Lead Councillor for Environment stated that the reported year's figures for 2019/20 showed a reported deficit of £43,667 and that consequently no additional payment was due to the Council. He confirmed that the overview and scrutiny working group members were

generally happy with the day to day operation of the facilities, but had expressed concern over the level of investment, the rise in customer complaints, and the long term strategy to address energy consumption.

A member of the Committee asked whether Freedom Leisure and the Council intended to produce an assessment in 6-9 months' time of the likely future demand for leisure facilities post-pandemic. In response, the Leisure Services Manager indicated after a successful vaccination rollout he expected people's leisure choices and behaviour to revert to those preceding the pandemic. In addition, he highlighted the possible adverse impact of social distancing restrictions on leisure facilities and leisure businesses and noted the changing nature of the leisure sector.

In reply to a question, the Leisure Services Manager indicated that Freedom Leisure's analysis of its customer complaints and its information sharing with the Council could be improved.

In response to questions, the Leisure Services Manager advised the Committee that enabling works for a major project to renew the drainage at the lido had been completed and that the main works should start at the end of the 2021 season. He informed the Committee that a new toilet block and changing cubicles would be provided as part of the project.

#### **OS66 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman advised the meeting that since the publication of the report submitted to the Committee the Safer Guildford Partnership Annual Report had been rescheduled from July to September.

In response to a question from a Committee member, the Chairman confirmed that an update report on unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments and Surrey's transit site would be scheduled for six months' time.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the amendments above, the work plan as presented in the report submitted to the Committee be approved.

The meeting finished at 9.49 pm

Signed .....

Date .....

Chairman